

Public Document Pack



EXECUTIVE

Date: Wednesday, 20 January 2021
Time: 1.00pm
Location: Virtual (via Zoom)
Contact: Ian Gourlay (01438) 242703
committees@stevenage.gov.uk

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

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 9 DECEMBER 2020

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 9 December 2020 for signature by the Chair.

Pages 5 – 16

3. MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

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

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 25 November 2020

Community Select Committee – 2 December 2020

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 15 December 2020

Pages 17 – 30

4. COVID-19 UPDATE

To consider a verbal update / presentation on the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. LAUNCH OF STEVENAGE AMENITY TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

To consider a revised policy for how amenity tree management will be delivered in the future.

Pages 31 – 70

6. LAUNCH OF STEVENAGE CEMETERY POLICY

To consider a new policy for how the Cemetery service in Stevenage will be delivered.

Pages 71 – 118

7. FUTURE TOWN, FUTURE TRANSPORT STRATEGY - 12 MONTH REVIEW

To consider the progress of the projects included in the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy, adopted in October 2019.

Pages 119 – 134

8. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2021/22

To consider the Council Tax Base for 2021/22.

Pages 135 – 140

9. FINAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) AND RENT SETTING REPORT 2021/22

To consider a report for recommendation to Council in respect of the final Housing Revenue Account Budget and Rent Setting for 2021/22.

Pages 141 – 234

10. DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2021/22

To consider the Draft General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting for 2020/21.

[TO FOLLOW]

11. DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/21 - 2025/26

To consider a report that includes proposals for revisions to the 2020/21 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme and the draft Capital Programme for 2021/22 onwards.

[TO FOLLOW]

12. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

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

13. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To consider the following motions –

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

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

14. PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 9 DECEMBER 2020

To approve as a correct record the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 9 December 2020 for signature by the Chair.
Pages 235 - 238

15. LOCALITY REVIEW LAND AND SITES DISPOSAL REPORT

To consider some proposed site disposals identified as part of the Locality Ward asset and land reviews.
Pages 239 - 260

16. THE FORMATION OF A WHOLLY OWNED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT COMPANY - RENEWED BUSINESS PLAN APPROVAL AND FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

To consider a renewed Business Plan for the Wholly Owned Housing Development Company.
Pages 261 - 302

17. LEISURE CONTRACT - COVID-19 AND MITIGATION MEASURES

To consider the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Leisure Management Contract and to consider mitigation measures to support the effective recovery of leisure facilities post pandemic.

[REPORT TO FOLLOW]

18. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

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

NOTE: Links to Part 1 Background Documents are shown on the last page of the individual report, where this is not the case they may be viewed by using the following link to agendas for Executive meetings and then opening the agenda for Wednesday, 20 January 2021 – <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/council-meetings/161153/>

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 9 December 2020

Time: 1.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

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

Start / End Time: Start Time: 1.00pm
End Time: 5.01pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Phil Bibby CC and Robin Parker CC (observers).

There were no declarations of interest.

The Leader of the Council welcomed Nick Penny (the incoming Assistant Director – Finance & Estates) to the meeting, and looked forward to him officially joining the Council on 14 December 2020.

The Leader then gave a Covid-themed Christmas message to the children of Stevenage.

The Leader referred to the recent staff “Celebrating Our People” Awards, and congratulated James Chettleburgh (Principal Planning Officer) on his employee of the year award, and the entirety of the SBC staff on the team of the year award.

2 MINUTES - 18 NOVEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 November 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 10 November 2020 be noted.

4 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Executive considered a brief verbal update on the Covid-19 pandemic from the Strategic Director (RP).

The Strategic Director (RP) advised as follows:

- the first UK citizens had been vaccinated with the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine, following the nation's receipt of the initial 800,000 doses; by Christmas, it was expected that the NHS would have received 4 Million doses of the vaccine;
- 280 GP immunisation centres across the UK were also expected to commence operation in the next week;
- independent analysis had been published indicating a 90% efficacy of the Oxford Astra Zeneca Covid-19 vaccine;
- London had been put on notice that it may soon receive Tier 3 Covid-19 restrictions should case numbers continue to rise at the current rate;
- Hertfordshire's case rate had increased by 12.3% in the past week, with a significant increase in cases amongst under 24 year olds – based on those figures, there was more chance of the county entering Tier 3 than Tier 1 should the rate of positive tests continue to rise;
- the HCC Director of Public Health had expressed concerns that some Hertfordshire residents had started to believe some of the false narratives surrounding the pandemic on social media, and hence work was underway through the Herts Communications Cell to ensure that messages of assurance were sent out to the public;
- the East and North Herts Acute Trust had been due to receive delivery of the vaccine on 7 December 2020 and the process would then commence to administer doses across the county; and
- the mass vaccination sites for Hertfordshire had been identified and were in the process of being mobilised, and the Council was awaiting an announcement as to when these centres would commence operation.

It was noted that requests from GP surgeries for assistance with Covid-19 vaccination related issues (parking, marshalling arrangements, etc.) were being fed into the Logistics Cell of the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum.

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

5 HOUSING FIRST APPROACH - STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Executive considered a report on a Housing First approach for Stevenage, outlining the Council's initial proposals for the medium and long term response to engaging and housing the Borough's rough sleeper clients, together with identifying the additional resources required.

By way of context, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People stated that, in the week prior to the Covid-19 national lockdown restrictions (16 March 2020), there were 121 households in Council-owned emergency or temporary accommodation, including 19 in bed and breakfast. During June 2020, after the restrictions were lifted, this figure had risen by 66% to 181 cases, including 69 in bed and breakfast. This level of demand had placed a significant strain on already stretched resources. At the start of September 2020, the Council had 153 households in temporary accommodation, and 47 in bed and breakfast, an all time high.

In respect of rough sleepers, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People advised that since the “Everyone in” directive was put in place in March 2020, the Council had received 126 cases of rough sleeping or at imminent risk of rough sleeping. The Council had placed these in accommodation. There were 26 cases currently accommodated and, of these, 16 clients were in nightly-let accommodation and 10 within the Council’s own temporary accommodation stock.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People explained that the report focused on the current spend in addressing homelessness, the activities that had been undertaken to date, and provided a summary of the proposals for the Council’s provision over the coming winter months.

The Housing Operations Manager (Providing Homes) gave a slide presentation on the report, covering the short, medium and long term plans for the implementation of Housing First, and the immediate next steps for progressing the initiative.

It was noted that the medium to long term Housing First proposals would be subject to a business case being brought back to the Executive before the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

In response to a series of Members’ questions, the Housing Operations Manager (Providing Homes) replied as follows:

- Winter 2020/21 Cold Weather provision – due to the pandemic, the accommodation previously used by SBC for Night Shelter accommodation for rough sleepers when the temperature fell to 0 degrees centigrade or below was not compliant with the Government’s Covid-19 guidance. The use of bed and breakfast accommodation would continue until arrangements could be put in place for the use of alternative, Covid-19 compliant, premises;
- Rough Sleepers – SBC was obliged to endeavour to house rough sleepers when they presented themselves to the Council, regardless of local connection. However, if a Stevenage local connection was not evident, but if a local connection was identified elsewhere, then it would be possible (following joint working with the local authority that covered that area) to arrange for individuals to be transferred back to that area to be accommodated;
- Officers had investigated the use of a Housing First approach already adopted by other Hertfordshire councils, including Dacorum and St. Albans (who favoured a dispersed units approach) and Welwyn Hatfield (who used a Housing in Multiple Occupation style provision). SBC would be considering a mixed dispersed units/HMO approach; and
- Best practice – this had been gleaned wider afield from the Hertfordshire Tactical Co-ordinating Group, which itself fed into a regional forum covering areas including London, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

The Housing Operations Manager (Providing Homes) undertook to arrange for her slide presentation to be sent to all Members of the Council.

It was noted that none of the funding provided to Hertfordshire County Council to deal with rough sleeping had, as yet, been shared with Borough/District Councils,

and that the Leader and Strategic Director (CF) were continuing to press for this to occur.

The Executive supported the Leader's additional recommendation that, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People and Assistant Directors of Finance & Estates and Housing & Investment, a letter should be written to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government highlighting the significant funding gap of those local authorities operating a Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the disparity between Government financial support provided to assist Councils' General Fund budgets, and the absence of similar support funding for HRAs (including full recompense of expenditure already incurred on rough sleeper accommodation), with a request that such support funding be provided as soon as possible.

The Leader thanked the Housing Team for the magnificent service they had provided during the coronavirus pandemic.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the support provided to homeless households during the Covid-19 restrictions, March – July 2020 and then November to December 2020 be noted.
2. That the Council's operational plan over the coming winter months, as detailed in the report, be approved, and that delegated authority is granted for the Strategic Director (RP), following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People, to agree any minor amendments, subject to financial control.
3. That the current service pressures in Housing and Investment within the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) be noted, which will be monitored by the Council's Finance department in line with the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) planning which will be reported to Executive as and when required.
4. That it be noted that funding has been obtained through Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MCHLG) for short term spends, and that the approach for use of these funds detailed at Paragraph 4.32 of the report be agreed.
5. That the Leader, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People and Assistant Directors of Finance & Estates and Housing & Investment, write a letter to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government highlighting the significant funding gap of those local authorities operating a Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the disparity between Government financial support provided to assist Councils' General Fund budgets, and the absence of similar support funding for HRAs (including full recompense of expenditure already incurred on rough sleeper accommodation), with a request that such support funding be provided as soon as possible.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report; and 5. To highlight a disparity in Government support funding for authorities with Housing Revenue Accounts. Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 STEVENAGE PARKING STRATEGY 2021 - 2031: PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Executive consider a report in respect of the draft Stevenage Parking Strategy 2021 – 2031, seeking approval to its publication for consultation purposes.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport advised that the draft Parking Strategy placed an increased emphasis on non-car modes, reflecting the adopted Transport Strategy and HCC Local Transport Plan 4. Whilst providing for those who needed to use cars, the Strategy sought to help to reduce the impact of parked vehicles on streets and people, support the Living Streets agenda and help move towards the town's zero-carbon ambitions.

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport explained that the Strategy provided a hierarchy to guide the design of new parking schemes, and set out clear criteria on important matters, such as the circumstances in which permit parking may be introduced or when new parking spaces would be constructed. The Strategy affirmed that on-street parking management would seek to remain self-funding, and included financial measures to help fund provision for non-motorised modes through requesting contributions when new facilities for car parking were provided, which would then be under SBC's control.

In response to a Member's request, the Engineering Services Manager confirmed that consideration of the provision of any new disabled parking spaces in the Borough would include the ability for sufficient space to allow disabled drivers/passengers to use any door to get in/out of the vehicle.

The Executive instructed officers to:

- Ensure that the consultation document contained a list of questions at the end of each section that the Council would wish consultees to answer as part of their representation/response to the document;
- Ensure that the consultation period be extended from one month to two months; and
- Ensure that, with consultation on Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs), a higher bar was set on the level of public consultation responses received on each CPZ proposal, and a similar high bar was set on the number of residents in favour of adopting a CPZ for their street/area.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the content of the draft Stevenage Parking Strategy 2021-2031, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be noted.
2. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director(Planning and Regulation), following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy,

Enterprise and Transport, to make minor amendments as are necessary in the final preparation of the draft Strategy prior to its consultation.

3. That the draft Stevenage Parking Strategy 2021-2031 be published for consultation in early 2021.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

7 HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE STRATEGY 2020 - 2030

The Executive considered a report seeking the adoption of the proposed Housing for Older People Strategy (HOPS) 2020 - 2030.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People advised that the Strategy outlined the Council's joint approach with Hertfordshire County Council to improve housing options for older people in the town, with the objective of enabling healthy ageing for older people in Stevenage through the provision of a new housing and support offer.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People stated that the Strategy has been guided by a series of surveys, workshops and events, and feedback from both residents and people who work with older people. This had shaped the main themes of the Strategy, and had guided the recommendations within it. This work has been supported by national and local research and data sources, together with best practice from other areas and national organisations.

The Housing Operations Manager (Managing Homes) gave a slide presentation on the report and Strategy, focussing on the four key themes of housing development, standards and design; information, advice and technology; support and assistance to help people move; and inter-organisational working. The presentation also outlined the financial resources required to support the implementation of the Strategy.

The Leader asked officers to ensure that reference to the Council's buy back scheme was included in the Strategy document prior to its final publication.

The Leader thanked the Team involved in the preparation of the Strategy for the level of compassion and care reflected in the document and for the extensive level of consultation on its contents.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the draft Housing for Older People Strategy 2020 - 2030, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.
2. That the Older Persons Strategy delivery post to implement the strategy be agreed (this is included in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) draft budget report and Medium Term Financial Security (MTFS) report presented to the December 2020 Executive).

3. That an interim report be submitted to the Executive in 1 year's time and a progress report in 2 years' time with any resource request or review that may be required.
4. That it be noted that a growth bid of £17,000 will be recommended for 2022/23 and included in the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy for modelling purposes, for the initiatives as set out in Section 5 of the report.
5. The proposed performance and monitoring indicator details, as set out on page 38 of the draft strategy, be agreed.
6. That, subject to approval of the draft Strategy, the front facing document be shared with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People and Leader of the Council for approval.
7. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment), following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People, to make any minor amendments as are necessary to the Strategy prior to its publication.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE 2020/21 - QUARTER TWO

The Executive considered a report with regard to the Council's Corporate Performance information and statistics relating to Quarter Two of 2020/21.

[During the element of the presentation on this item which related to grant funding received by SBC from the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Leader declared a personal interest as a Member of the Hertfordshire LEP Board, but stated that she had not been involved in any decisions regarding approval of the above grant funding.]

The Chief Executive gave a slide presentation on the report. By way of introduction, he commented that in spite of Covid-19, the Council had generally maintained good progress in respect of its Future Town Future Council (FTFC) and Corporate Performance Indicators. However, a number of the PIs had been affected by the Covid-19 situation. It had been and continued to be one of the toughest years faced by SBC, as it maintained a balance between front line service provision, delivering FTFC objectives, responding to Covid-19, and the challenges of Brexit.

The Chief Executive advised that, of the 13 FTFC PIs, 5 were green; 1 was amber; 5 were red; and 2 were not available. In relation to the 41 Corporate PIs, 23 were green; 2 were amber; 8 were red; and 8 were not available. The amber, red and not available PIs were primarily due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chief Executive went through the reasons for the amber, red and not available PIs, together with planned measures for their improvement, all as detailed in the

report. He concluded by referring to a number of the performance highlights achieved by the Council during Quarter Two of 2020/21.

In reply to a question from the Leader, the Strategic Director (CF) undertook to investigate and respond on whether the rent arrears figures set out in Paragraphs 3.104 (£765,753.39) and 3.108 (£368,283.37) of the report should form a cumulative total for rent arrears.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes for Quarter Two 2020/21, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
2. That, in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, the Council be recommended to continue the adoption of the current Co-operative Corporate Plan, subject to further review in Autumn 2022.
3. That impacts of the Government directive on housing rough sleepers during Covid-19 be noted and that future Housing First plans be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.97 to 3.102 of the report).
4. That the impacts on the Council's Housing Options Service from the Government directive on evictions and the COVID-19 pandemic be noted and that future Housing First Plans be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.92 to 3.96 of the report).
5. That the impacts of Universal Credit and COVID-19 on rent collection rate be noted and action plans be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.103 to 3.113 of the report).
6. That the impacts of COVID-19 on the following areas be noted and plans be endorsed:
 - Job Creation/New Business Start Up through the Business Technology Centre (Paragraphs 3.125 to 3.128 of the report);
 - Ability to inspect food establishments (Paragraphs 3.129 to 3.131 of the report);
 - Issues with the letting of Council garages (Paragraphs 3.132 to 3.138 of the report);
 - Collection of Council Tax (Paragraph 3.165 of the report); and
 - Ability to identify and remove HRA/GF savings (Paragraphs 3.166 to 3.168 of the report).
7. That the level of void loss and how voids sheltered and major works impacts this measure be noted, and improvements be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.114 to

3.122 of the report).

8. That the plans to improve website satisfaction be endorsed (Paragraphs 3.155 to 3.157 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT RENT SETTING AND BUDGET REPORT 2021/22

The Executive considered a report in respect of the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting and budget report 2021/22.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that it was proposed that the HRA rent on dwellings be increased by 1.5%, which would be an average increase of £1.46 for social rents, £2.38 for affordable rents and £1.80 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52 week year). This had been calculated using the rent formula CPI +1%, in line with the Government's rent policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that the impact of the proposed changes in service charges meant that 1,710 or 58% of homes (who pay a service charge) would receive a service charge reduction, even though service charges had fluctuated between individual services. There were only two properties with a service charge increase above £4.00.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources commented that the impact of the 2021/22 combined rent and service charges increases meant:

- 306 homes or 4% would receive a rent and service charge reduction;
- 7,578 homes or 96% of households would receive a weekly rent and service charge increase of less than £3.50 (based on 52 weeks); and
- There were only 5 properties with an increase of more than £5.00.

In terms of the draft HRA Budget for 2021/22, the Portfolio Holder for Resources explained that this had reduced by £204,000 from the position reported to the Executive in November 2020, as set out in Paragraph 4.7.1 of the report. The HRA Budget for 2020/21 had changed by £63,000, as summarised in Paragraph 4.7.2 of the report.

In respect of borrowing, the Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that, last year, the HRA Business Plan was recalculated to take advantage of the lifting of the HRA debt cap that had restricted HRA borrowing to £217Million. New loans totalling £23.8Million and £26.6Million were expected to be taken in the current and next financial years. However, the decision when to take the new borrowing would be reviewed, weighing up the cost of carry and the prevailing Public Works Loan board (PWLb) rates.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources stated that HRA capital spend was projected to be £34.1Million in 2020/21, with £22.9Million being on works to existing homes, and

that in 2021/22 capital spend would increase to £49.3 Million, with £30.1 Million being on new homes and £18.6 Million on works to existing homes. The majority of funding for the capital programme would come from new loans and there was therefore no requirement for a revenue contribution to capital (RCCO) in 2021/22 as result of the borrowing

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health & Older People added that, when comparing rents for a 3 bed property, a Private Sector rent would be on average 133% more than a Council social rent, and 32% more than the Council's affordable homes. The SBC rentals were therefore much more affordable for those residents in the Borough that needed to rent properties.

The Strategic Director (CF) stated that, between the draft and final HRA/rent setting reports, an assessment would be made of the 2020/21 rent arrears position. Also, the report had been written prior to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement on the 2021/22 Finance Settlement. The funding announcement included a pay freeze for 2021/22 with the exception of low paid workers. This would reduce the costs in the HRA draft budget by £148,000.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Housing Revenue Account rent on dwellings be increased, from week commencing 5 April 2021, by 1.5% which is an average increase of £1.46 for social rents, £2.38 for affordable rents and £1.80 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52 week year), having been calculated using the rent formula CPI +1%, in line with the Government's rent policy set out in Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report.
2. That the draft 2021/22 Housing Revenue Account be approved, as set out in Appendix A to the report, but it be noted that this may be subject to change as a result of any consultation and the finalisation of recharges from the General Fund.
3. That it be noted that the final Housing Revenue Account rent setting budget for 2021/22 would be presented to the Executive on 20 January 2021 and Council on 28 January 2021.
4. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted and their views fed back into the 2021/22 budget setting process.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

10 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

The Chair accepted an urgent item of business in respect of a verbal update/presentation from the Strategic Director (RP) on European Union Transition (Brexit).

The Strategic Director (RP) provided updates on the current position on Brexit; the implications of a no trade deal scenario; the Hertfordshire response; immediate and significant risks to Hertfordshire; the SBC response; key risks for the town; key risks for the Council; and measures in place to provide support to local businesses.

It was **RESOLVED** that the verbal update/presentation on European Union Transition (Brexit) be noted.

11 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

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

12 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 18 NOVEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 November 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

13 FINANCIAL SECURITY OPTIONS 2021/22

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of a range of Financial Security Options regarding the 2021/22 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained in the report, together with one additional recommendation made at the meeting, be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

14 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 25 November 2020

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Sandra Barr, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, Michelle Gardner, Andy McGuinness, John Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.26pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sarah Mead.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 13 OCTOBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 October 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered the decisions on the following matters arising from the Executive meeting held on 18 November 2020.

Minutes of the Executive – 6 October 2020

Noted.

Minutes of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

Covid-19 – Update

The Strategic Director (RP), assisted by the Strategic Director (CF), responded to a number of questions raised by Members as follows:

- Mass vaccination centres – it was confirmed that, should there be icy weather conditions over the winter months, it would be the responsibility of HCC to grit/salt highways in the vicinity of mass vaccination centres, but that SBC would be responsible for the gritting/salting of non-highway areas surrounding Neighbourhood/Community Centres should any of these be required for use as

vaccination centres;

- Covid Tier System – the Government was due to announce the new Tier system on 26 November 2020, and it was expected that Hertfordshire would be in Tier 2. The tiers were based on a number of factors (including numbers testing positive, current and projected hospital admissions, etc.), and the Government had indicated that the allocation of areas into tiers would be a central decision, with it being unlikely that individual areas would be permitted to contest this decision;
- Covid Suppression Plan for Stevenage – in terms of the county-wide Tactical Co-ordinating Group, Stevenage was a Priority 2 area, and the Group's focus was currently directed towards Priority 1 areas, such as Broxbourne and Three Rivers. Analysis showed that a significant proportion of Stevenage Covid cases was due to general community transmission; and
- Discretionary financial support for mobile businesses – the Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme would be intended to assist those businesses adversely affected by the pandemic in terms of them having received little or no support funding. Once the Scheme was signed off, this would give SBC the ability to provide support to such businesses, although it was stressed that SBC's total grant funding for this purpose was £1.75Million (up to 31 March 2021). Information on how to apply for support funding would be available on the Council's website, and applicants would also be able to contact the Shared Revenues & Benefits Service.

Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD): Public Consultation

In response to Members' questions, the Principal Planning Officer replied as follows:

- The formula/metric for 10% net biodiversity gain would be used following an audit of each application site; the biodiversity of each site would be graded according to numerous criteria, including quality and distinctiveness; the assistance of the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust would be sought on large applications;
- The Principal Planning Officer undertook to include more information about the DEFRA metric and how it was used to grade the biodiversity of a site in the SPD prior to its adoption. This suggestion would be recorded as a formal response to the consultation; and
- The definition of minor amendments to the SPD prior to publication for consultation relating to textual, grammatical or formatting errors; it was anticipated that any major changes required to the document would be picked up through the public consultation process.

Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD): Public Consultation

In response to Members' questions, the Principal Planning Officer replied as follows:

- The situations where Section 106 payments would be required in addition to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments would be where specific site

mitigation would be required (such as the Town Centre Primary Education required as part of the SG1 development, as opposed to a more general primary education requirement across the town);

- It was recognised that, despite the use of CIL, there would invariably be an infrastructure funding gap, although other funding streams (such as Sports England) could be investigated; the Council was committed to re-visiting the CIL rates in future years, following its introduction.

Hertfordshire Growth Board – Proposed Future Governance Arrangements

In reply to Members' questions, the Borough Solicitor, assisted by Strategic Directors, responded as follows:

- The Growth Board would be concerned with major infrastructure issues, and would be limited in its remit to lobby the Government regarding the status of specific planning applications (such as the SG1 application), which were the responsibility of individual local authorities with planning powers; and
- In relation to the Government Spending Review announcement and the £4Billion levelling up fund, and the need for support of Local MPs, could this put the Town Fund Deal and ability to access the funding it required at risk, it was confirmed that the Town Deal was covered by a clear guidance and a prospectus as how bids would be considered by the Government. Further details in respect of the £4 Billion fund were awaited, but related to projects that had to be delivered within the lifetime of the current Parliament (and the media had indicated with local support from the community and the MP), and included projects such as new by-passes; upgrading of railway stations; more libraries, museums and galleries; and improved high streets and town centres.

Mid Year Review of 2020/21 Treasury Management Strategy

The Strategic Director (CF) advised that the Government had announced its review of PWLB, which included councils being prevented from borrowing to invest for yield, essentially for commercial investments. If councils were not doing that then the Government was now minded to reverse its 1% increase in PWLB borrowing rates. The downside was that if councils were borrowing from other sources for investment purposes then the opportunity to borrow from the PWLB would be forfeited.

In reply to a question, the Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that the closure of the Amundi Money Market Fund (based in Luxembourg) was due to Brexit. In future, funds would need to be invested in UK-domiciled money market funds.

Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (2020/21 – 2024/25)

Noted.

Second Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2020/21 – General Fund

Noted.

Second Quarter General Fund Capital Monitoring Report 2020/21

Noted.

Urgent Part I Business – SG1 Planning Application

Noted.

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

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered the Part II decisions on the following matters arising from the Executive meeting held on 18 November 2020.

New Station North Multi-Storey Car Park

Noted.

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

None.

9 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 2 December 2020

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Margaret Notley (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Alex Farquharson, John Mead, Claire Parris and Loraine Rossati.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.10pm

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Liz Harrington.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 21 OCTOBER 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 21 October 2020 be approved as a correct record.

3 **HCC DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH PRESENTATION**

The Director of Public Health (Public Health Service - Hertfordshire County Council), Jim McManus, was in attendance at the meeting. He gave an update on the current local position in respect of the Coronavirus and responded to a number of questions from Members on the matter including:

- How was data collated from hospitals and how were the Trusts communicating with the public? The Local Outbreak Board, an officer Board Chaired by the Director of Public Health, was accountable to a Local Member Board which included the eleven Council Leaders across the County along with the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Director's team collected a series of data from a number of sources and published a series of reports including one allowing councils to carry out contract tracing. He advised that Communications was the responsibility of the communications group.
- In relation to walk-in test centres, these were already up and running in some areas with another 4 coming on line shortly. Lateral flow tests were being used by the NHS, in care homes and for the most vulnerable children and young people.
- In relation to Christmas, people should continue to be careful and try to reduce the risk as much as possible. Very limited mixing could happen and although the rules were 3 families being able to mix, people should limit their

social interaction where possible. He advised that enforcement had now been ramped up for people refusing to wear masks and warnings issued to those retailers who had not put measures in place.

- Currently there were only three symptoms of covid warranting a test but these were the most reliable symptoms – loss of taste, loss of smell and a fever.
- In terms of children at school, the evidence was that it was better to keep children in school and the Public Health Team was working with schools currently to ensure that this was as covid secure as possible. The Director was of the view that teachers should be higher up the vaccine priority list than they currently were. He agreed that the mental health concerns and fallout would be greater than envisaged.
- The Director advised that he did not have the figures for the number of people not being able to access other medical treatments since the start of the pandemic. Services had been affected however due to generic public health nurses having been diverted to covid wards.
- The bulk of the severe cases were related to age and pre-existing conditions.
- The Director's advice remained that people should treat everyone else as if they had Covid. People should go shopping at times when it is less busy and if the shop was busy when you arrived, consider returning at a different time.
- Long-covid clinics were beginning to be set up with support groups and pathways being developed.

The Chair thanked the Director of Public Health for his presentation and responses and asked that the Committee's thanks be passed on to the Director's staff and teams for their hard work on the issue.

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

4 **PROGRESSING STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY DURING 2020**

Candice Bryan, Health and Sport Strategy Manager, Stevenage Borough Council gave a presentation to the Committee on progressing Stevenage Borough Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy during 2020.

Candice responded to a number of questions and points raised by Members of the Committee including:

- In relation to work on weight management and community kitchen, evidence was that a lot of people did not have the skills and knowledge but a more robust evaluation was now taking place working alongside the university. Candice advised she would come back to the Chair on any information on this issue contained within the Interim report. It was also agreed that the environment/place that people lived in affected health.
- People's levels of anxiety had increased since the beginning of the pandemic, but it was felt that anxiety support messages were non-existent. Candice agreed the need to bring this support and advice to the community rather than them to come to us.
- Candice agreed to find out the details of the activities happening at the St Nicholas Community Centre and advise the ward councillors. Members

should be encouraged to advise Candice of any suggestions for additional ideas for groups or new initiatives.

- Work was on-going on how services could be delivered to those residents who were not on-line.
- In relation to existing walking groups, Candice advised that she was aware of a number of groups and was looking at bringing all the information together in one place.

The Chair thanked Candice for her presentation and her work on the Strategy over the last year.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 15 December 2020

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Laurie Chester, Michael Downing, Michelle Gardner, Andy McGuinness, John Mead, Sarah Mead, Adam Mitchell CC, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.30pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

2 MINUTES - 25 NOVEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 November 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered the decisions on the following matters arising from the Executive meeting held on 18 November 2020.

Minutes of the Executive – 18 November 2020

Noted.

Minutes of Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees

Noted.

Covid-19 – Update

The Strategic Director (RP) updated the Committee on the latest Tier position in the County with parts of Hertfordshire having been put into Tier 3. He advised that there would be a Coronavirus Executive Committee on Friday 18 December at 2.00pm which members could view on YouTube which would include the latest epidemiology figures.

A series of Members' questions followed with responses from the Strategic Director:

- In relation to supermarkets, it had been widely reported at briefings that there was a particular issue with regard to the spread of Covid. The Strategic Director advised that there was a Covid protocol in place which had been agreed through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) which all supermarkets should follow. It was suggested that the sanitisation stations should be at the exit of the supermarkets as well as the entrances.
- The SD agreed to find out whether shops had a duty to count customers in their stores, although it was thought that it was guidance/good practice rather than in any regulation.
- Covid Marshals – a business case would be submitted to the County Council for additional resources for more marshals to increase compliance activity. The numbers of Marshals was also being supplemented through redeployed staff from the communities and neighbourhood Department to ensure increased compliance activity. Significant marshalling activity was being undertaken in the Town Centre.
- A deep dive into statistics included a daily analysis of epidemiology data received into the County from the NHS/hospital/test and trace information. This allowed more targeted work to be undertaken.
- The Council was still waiting for the formal notice for information regarding the location of vaccination centres. Initially, vaccines would be administered through the hospital or doctors surgeries. Individuals should be contacted by their surgeries in the priority order set out by the Government. Members were of the view that some people could be missed and advised anyone concerned to contact their GP directly.

Housing First Approach - Stevenage Borough Council

In response to Members' questions, the Housing Operations Manager replied as follows:

- Officers would ask the Leader of the Council if she was happy for the Stevenage MP to be contacted in relation to the request to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to recognise and assist with the significant funding gap now experienced by local authorities operating a Housing Revenue Account.
- In relation to the rules around local connection, officers advised that the Homelessness Reduction Act required local authorities to look at the local connexion of someone presenting themselves as homeless as a last step following their accommodation.
- The Strategic Director (CF) informed the Committee that the Government required Councils to submit covid related costs on a monthly basis including rough sleeping/homelessness grant funding.

Stevenage Parking Strategy 2021 – 2031: Public consultation

In response to Members' questions, the Engineering Services Manager replied as follows:

- In relation to electronic vehicle charging points, the strategy was not too

specific as officers were aware that it was still early stages for electronic charging/vehicles and full consideration would be given in the future towards a programme for delivery. Officers confirmed that they would be working with the County Council to ensure there was a consistent electronic charging infrastructure;

- The Verge and Footway parking prohibition order had not been rolled out to the Old Town, Woodfield and Symonds Green Wards for a number of reasons including:
 - The Old Town being a special case with narrow roads and pavements etc;
 - Woodfield already having had a lot of investment in this area particularly around the hospital;
 - Symonds Green being one of the later built wards in the Town having larger parking areas built in.
- In terms of enforcement, depending on how many restrictions were in place, the Council would deploy the right level of enforcement.
- The Executive had asked for the consultation period to be extended from one month to two months. The consultation would include the Council's website, social media, the Chronicle along with a questionnaire. In response to suggestions by Members, officers agreed to engage councillors in the consultation process to get their ideas and share the proposed consultation plan with them to ensure as comprehensive a consultation as possible.

Housing For Older People Strategy 2020 – 2030

In response to Members' questions, the Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) replied as follows:

- Information relating to the reasons for the change in tenure would be circulated to members;
- Conversations and consultation would be ongoing with customers and stakeholders to ensure the strategy would continuously evolve.
- The Committee's thanks would be conveyed to those officers responsible for the comprehensive consultation process on the draft strategy.

Corporate Performance 2020/21 – Quarter 2

In response to Members' questions, the Strategic Director (TP) replied as follows:

- Officers would be asked to produce future reports with an additional column detailing the units used in each indicator;
- In relation to rent arrears, an Arrears Action Recovery Plan was in place to ensure people were supported and claiming the benefits they were entitled to.
- The SD would look into the seasonally adjusted recycling targets and provide details to Cllr S Mead.

Draft Housing Revenue Account Rent Setting and Budget Report 2021/22

Noted.

Urgent Part I Business

The Strategic Director (RP) gave an update on European Union Transition (Brexit). He advised that any updates on this matter would be brought to Members as soon as they were available. The Council would be working with partners such as the Citizens Advice Bureau to keep residents in particular EU residents informed of the latest position.

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

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 25 NOVEMBER 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 November 2020 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

8 PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered the Part II decisions on the following matters arising from the Executive meeting held on 9 December 2020.

Financial Security Options 2021/22

Noted.

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

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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Meeting Executive Committee
Portfolio Area Environment & Regeneration
Date 20 January 2021



LAUNCH OF STEVENAGE AMENITY TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

KEY DECISION

Lead Officer: Steve Dupoy, ext 2833
Author: Julia Hill, ext 2900
Contributors: Lloyd Walker, ext 2517
Cristian Pinta, ext 2760

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members and stakeholders with a revised policy for how amenity tree management, i.e. trees on Stevenage Borough Council land (not including woodlands), will be delivered in future.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive approves the Stevenage Amenity Tree Management Policy 2020, as set out at Appendix B.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As Britain's first new town, Stevenage was designed with a great deal of emphasis on green space and its importance in helping to create a thriving community. Existing features such as hedgerows and lanes, woodlands and veteran trees were retained and used to create open space, wildlife corridors and an immediate sense of place and many of these features still exist today.

- 3.2 The current Tree Management Policy focusses on the Council's statutory obligations with regards works to trees. However, good tree stock management can deliver a range of benefits for:
- the environment/climate change,
 - wildlife,
 - peoples mental and physical health and wellbeing,
 - social value,
 - local economy.
- 3.3 There are approximately 32,500 amenity trees in Stevenage, and around 50% are owned by Stevenage Borough Council (SBC). The other 50% are owned by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and maintained by SBC under the Highways Agency Agreement (HAA).
- 3.4 Within the terms of the current HAA, HCC fund the scheduled maintenance of highway trees, and the cost of ad-hoc reactive works including new planting on highway land.
- 3.5 Officers are currently negotiating a new HAA with HCC to ensure that we achieve full cost recovery in the future.
- 3.6 HCC will be approached to seek their support of the new policy, and a commitment to funding replacement tree planting in accordance with the SBC amenity tree management policy.
- 3.7 However, despite a presumption that all trees will be retained as far as it is safe and practical to do so, it is estimated that the tree stock has reduced by around 7,500 amenity trees over the past twenty years. This loss is in part due to more trees being felled (as a result of them being dead, dangerous, proven to be causing damage to property, for example) than the rate at which new ones are planted.
- 3.8 Much of the tree stock in Stevenage today was planted as the town developed, and whilst this brings many rewards and benefits it does also present challenges, including:
- around 50% of the amenity trees are Norway Maples. A more diverse tree stock would be advantageous to limit the risk of tree loss due to species specific pest / disease;
 - large proportion of the tree stock is reaching maturity at the same time. A phased programme of replacement planting will be required;

- some trees planted by the development corporation were chosen as they were quick to establish and mature. They are not always the most appropriate tree for their location.

3.9 In June 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency. Trees help the response to the climate crises by capturing unavoidable emissions, improving air quality, absorbing pollutants, and helping to mitigate surface water flooding.

3.10 Without a long term policy for how we plan to manage, protect and enhance the tree stock in Stevenage any short term considerations are likely to adversely affect a majority of trees in the town at some point.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Trees provide a wide range of benefits to support our local community now and in the future e.g. environmental, biodiversity, climate change, health, social and economic. Each year we are removing more trees than we plant. Without appropriate protection, care and management there is a risk of depleting the tree stock / canopy level beyond their current level.

4.2 The new policy sets out the principles of how the Council will manage its tree stock to ensure that the trees are safe, provide maximum benefit to the town, and how developers and the community can play a role in the future tree-
scape of Stevenage.

4.3 The ambitions set out in the policy support the Climate Change Strategy, the protection of biodiversity in Stevenage, and the emerging Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document.

4.4 An important way of making our towns and cities more hospitable in the coming decades is to increase the number, and size, of trees in our urban areas.

4.5 The policy seeks to reduce any risk associated with the tree stock through measures including:

- management and maintenance undertaken in accordance with current best practice;
- new tree planting to be informed through consideration of a range of criteria to identify appropriate selection of tree species and location, in accordance with current guidance and best practice, to minimise conflict with residents and their property;

- all potential claimants to provide sufficient technical evidence to demonstrate that the tree is the primary cause of any damage to property;
 - a requirement for all developers to demonstrate that proposed new builds will incorporate the use of deeper, engineered foundations, as necessary, to take account of the geology of the local area.
- 4.6 i-Tree Canopy is an online canopy cover assessment tool, which provides a scientifically robust and consistent approach to estimating canopy cover. In 2016 i-Tree Canopy assessments of the 265 towns and cities of England was undertaken. At that time the tree stock in Stevenage provided a tree canopy cover (the layer of leaves, branches, and tree stems that cover the ground at maturity) of around 17%.
- 4.7 Best practice guidance suggests a target of achieving a 20% tree canopy cover by 2050, but there is also a recommendation that every local authority should commit to a minimum 30% tree canopy cover target for new development land.
- 4.8 Many of these additional trees could be planted to create extended areas of woodland, however suitable trees do provide valuable benefits in the street-scape and residential areas too:
- They take in a range of pollutants and toxins which are emitted by our everyday activities. This is more vital than ever these days to help combat air pollution.
 - A single mature, leafy tree can absorb up to 450 litres of water through its roots every day. Particularly vital in combatting flash flooding in urban areas.
 - Evapo-transpiration produces a cooling effect. Trees also provide shade for the ground and buildings, resulting in further cooling and less energy usage. The overall cooling effect of a single, mature tree on average is equivalent to 10 air conditioning units running for 20 hours in a day (Trees for Cities)
 - Being around nature, specifically trees, has been shown to reduce the levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) in our brains, helping to reduce the symptoms of anxiety and stress.
- 4.9 Guidance suggests planting 3 new trees for each tree that is felled, in order to allow for trees lost before they become established. To provide 2 new trees for each tree felled would result in costs for this Council of around £45,000 annually. To deliver a replacement of the estimated 7,500 amenity trees felled during the last 20 years would cost a further £1.9 million, or £63,500 annually to achieve this by 2030.

- 4.10 The policy supports the Council's ambition to replace these trees through the use of planning contributions, external funding, sponsorship and grants.
- 4.11 The document sets out policies in eight key areas / themes. A detailed summary of the policies can be found in Appendix C, and examples of the key policies in each area are as follows:
- **Management**
 - Minimising risk through timely inspections and appropriate maintenance regimes.
 - **Maintenance**
 - All requests relating to the planting, maintenance or felling of any tree on Council land will be submitted to Stevenage Direct Services;
 - Take appropriate enforcement action in response to unauthorised works to Council trees or fly-tipping.
 - **Planting, Establishment and Design**
 - factors for identifying appropriate tree species, and suitable locations for new tree planting;
 - the importance of providing a combination of locally native tree species, and non-native species, in future tree planting.
 - **Trees and the Community**
 - informing local residents of any significant planned tree works in their local area;
 - community engagement to support tree planting and maintenance.
 - **Trees and Buildings**
 - the requirement for evidence where a Council owned tree is alleged to be causing damage to a building.
 - **Trees and New Developments**
 - guidance for the protection of existing trees during works to the built environment;
 - requirements of developers to provide tree planting within new residential developments.
 - **Dangerous Trees in Private Ownership**
 - legal powers available for responding to safety works required to privately owned trees.
 - **Environmental Responsibilities**
 - the use of UK sourced and grown stock for all new tree planting by the Council.
- 4.12 Consultation regarding the new policy has been undertaken with:

- Officers in Planning Policy, Regeneration, Housing Development, Insurance, Improving Homes Programme, Engineers, Community Development, Estates and Legal;
- Councillor Sharon Taylor, Leader of the Council;
- Councillor John Gardner, Executive Member for Environment & Regeneration;
- the Portfolio Holder's Advisory Group;
- Public consultation, via the Council's webpages (promoted via social media) during November / December 2020.

All comments and feedback from the consultation has been considered and the draft policy amended as indicated.

- 4.13 Following approval of the policy, officers propose to develop an Amenity Tree Management Strategy that will support the ongoing delivery of a good quality tree stock for future generations to benefit from.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 The total working budget for the tree's service (contained within Parks Playing Fields & Open Spaces revenue budgets), for 2020/21, is £107K which includes £3k per annum for tree planting. The budget is used to provide tools, personal protective equipment (PPE) and vehicles for the Council's tree teams and for the supply, planting and maintenance of new trees.
- 5.2 To plant two trees for each tree felled would cost the Council £45K per annum which would maintain the number of trees in Stevenage at the current level. It would cost a further £63.5K per annum for the next 30 years to replenish the estimated 7,500 trees felled in the past 20 years. Based on the current core budgets there is insufficient funding in the revenue budget for either of these options.
- 5.3 Due to the Council's current financial position, no growth bid is being requested currently to support additional tree planting. Officers are exploring third party resources such as the availability and use of S106 or CIL funding, as well as sponsorship and external grant contributions to fund any tree planting programme. This means the replenishment of tree numbers in terms of the 7,500 trees will rely on the access to third party funding.

Legal Implications

- 5.3 The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012, administered by Local Planning Authorities (LPA) may be made to protect trees that bring significant amenity benefit to the local area. All types of tree can be protected, and a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) can protect anything from a single tree to all trees within a defined area or woodland.

- 5.4 The Occupiers Liability Acts places a legal obligation to maintain trees to ensure the safety of the public, and to consider as part of that obligation for any surrounding buildings.
- 5.5 Legislation including, but not exclusive to, s1 Localism Act 2011 and section 111 Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to seek compensation for damage or loss of a Council owned tree when that damage is caused by a wilful or negligent actions.

Risk Implications

- 5.6 This policy seeks to reduce the risk to the Council through:
- management of the tree-stock in accordance with current best practice;
 - appropriate selection of tree species and location, in accordance with current guidance and best practice, to minimise conflict with residents and their property.
 - requiring sufficient technical evidence to be provided to demonstrate that the tree is the primary cause of any damage to property.
 - requiring developers to demonstrate that proposed new buildings will incorporate the use of deeper, engineered foundations, as necessary to take account of the geology of the local area.

Policy Implications

- 5.7 This policy supports other local policy documents including the Climate Change Strategy and Planning Policy.

Planning Implications

- 5.8 The policy requires that all new developments will support new tree planting, either directly or through planning contributions, equivalent to a minimum 20% tree canopy cover at maturity, with a phased approach dependent on the size of the development.

Environmental Implications

- 5.9 The policy will seek to ensure that, at a minimum, the current levels of tree canopy in Stevenage do not fall below their current levels, and actually seek to increase tree canopy cover through appropriate planting in appropriate locations.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.10 Trees help the response to the climate crises by capturing unavoidable emissions, improving air quality, absorbing pollutants, and helping to mitigate surface water flooding.
- 5.11 One of the best ways of making our towns and cities more hospitable in the coming decades is to increase the number, and size, of trees in our urban areas.

Background documents

1.1 All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e. they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:

BD1 Tree Management Policy

BD2 Consultation responses to original draft document

APPENDICES

A Current Tree Management Policy

B New Amenity Tree Management Policy

C Summary of Policies from the Amenity Tree Management Policy

APPENDIX A

Current Tree Management Policy

There are approximately 30,000 trees in Stevenage, the majority of which were planted in a relatively short period of time as the town rapidly expanded.

Subsequently many of these trees have reached maturity at the same time.

As a consequence the Council was receiving a significantly increased number of requests for tree pruning. This had led to a considerable back log of tree works, great delays in completing them and therefore considerable frustration among residents.

The Council undertook a review of the arrangements for managing and maintaining the town's trees to ensure that available resources were used in the most economic and efficient manner and to improve customer satisfaction in the longer term. The review concluded that, despite additional resources having been made available, the existing reactive management arrangements were no longer sustainable.

It has therefore been decided that the Council would move toward a planned and cyclical schedule of routine maintenance for all trees. The duration of one cycle is approximately three years.

The routine maintenance work started in September 2009. During this programme, the Council will endeavour to address all statutory tree problems. The non statutory tree problems will be addressed where this does not contravene environmental issues, arboricultural guidelines and reasonable practicability.

Statutory Tree Works

1. Dangerous or unstable trees and branches likely to cause injury to persons
2. Trees causing or likely to cause damage to property
3. Trees obstructing the highway or footpaths
4. Trees obstructing streetlights or CCTV cameras
5. Other risk related works

Non Statutory Tree Works

The Council does not have a statutory obligation to deal with the following tree related problems:

- Loss of light / reduced light to properties.
- Effects on TV or mobile phone reception
- Obstruction of views
- Interference with private vegetation
- Obstruction of utility cables (These are the responsibility of the statutory provider or cable owner)
- Branches overhanging gardens or buildings unless there is potential or particular risk.
- Minor or seasonal issues such as:
 - o Honeydew (dripping sap)
 - o Bird droppings
 - o Animals gaining access to properties via trees
 - o Leaf, fruit or flower fall
 - o Smells generated by trees
- Tree roots growing into adjacent properties
- Other problems judged by the inspecting officer to be relatively minor inconveniences

Property owners are legally entitled to make private arrangements or organise the cutting back of any branches overhanging their property as long as the tree is not subject to a tree preservation order and they dispose of the cuttings properly. The cutting back should only be as far as the fence or boundary line. Cuttings which are left on Council property will be considered as fly tipping and will be subject to appropriate enforcement action which may result in the issue of a fixed penalty notice or legal action through the courts.

Should you wish to employ a private contractor to carry out work to the entire tree, you can do so however, prior to the works, we need to meet with the contractor in question, have sight of their insurance, qualifications and discuss and agree on what works will be carried out. If you want to proceed with this option, please contact Cristian Pinta, The Council's Arboriculture and Conservation Manager via E-mail at cristian.pinta@stevenage.gov.uk .

Tree Felling

Stevenage Borough Council will not usually remove trees unless one of the following reasons exists:

- A tree is considered dead, dying or dangerous.
- The removal of the tree is to benefit adjacent trees (thinning).
- Trees that are proven, (beyond reasonable doubt), to be the cause of clay shrinkage subsidence.
- The tree has caused damage to or is likely to cause damage to adjacent structures and pruning will not resolve the problem.
- The tree is a species which it is known will ultimately outgrow its location and in doing so unreasonably restrict the use of the area.

The tree stands in the way of essential development work such as road improvements.

Desired tree works

Residents can request for works to be carried out to particular trees by calling 01438242242, e-mailing customerservicecentre@stevenage.gov.uk or writing to us at Stevenage Borough Council, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, SG1 2HN. The request will be considered in our routine work however there is no guarantee that all desired works will be carried out. Statutory/non statutory duties, environmental issues, arboricultural guidelines and reasonable practicability will also be considered.

If you have already placed a request with us regarding the pruning of a particular tree/s, your request has already been added onto our programme and considered during our work as above.

APPENDIX B

Amenity Tree Management Policy

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1. Introduction

Within the context of this document amenity trees refers to trees that are planted in parks, open spaces, and along our streets and cycle networks.

It has long been recognised that amenity trees are an essential landscape feature within our 21st century towns and cities, and Stevenage is no exception. The new town planners included for extensive tree planting to be undertaken as well as the retention of much of the existing farm woodland and hedgerow during the initial development of the town. Their foresight has been realised in the tree stock which we have inherited and enjoy today.

Trees positively contribute to our lives in many ways and just as it is us who are benefitting now, from the foresight of the original new town planners, so we must show our commitment to the future by continuing to plant new, and manage existing, trees for the benefit of future generations.

The overall aims of this policy are to ensure that trees are retained, managed, protected and planted in accordance with sound landscape and arboricultural practice, with due regard to their contribution to amenity and urban landscape for both current and future generations.

1.1 The Importance of Trees

Trees and woodlands make a significant contribution to every community, providing a wide range of benefits to local people, wildlife, the economy and climate change:

1.1.1 Environmental

- Trees help to mitigate the effects of climate change
- Trees improve air quality by acting as natural air filters removing dust, smoke and fumes from the atmosphere.
- Trees reduce the 'greenhouse' effect by taking up carbon dioxide from the air, using the carbon to build wood and releasing the oxygen.
- Trees are an effective sound barrier and can help to limit noise pollution.

- Trees, in urban areas, help to moderate the local climate: providing shade from sun in summer, shelter from rain, and reducing wind speeds.
- Tree canopies reduce rainstorm impact and provide a natural alternative to resource-heavy flood control systems that depend on hard engineering.
- Trees provide form, colour, texture and movement. They change with the seasons.
- Trees enhance the built environment by reinforcing local character, providing privacy to homes, and screening intrusive developments.
- By providing food and shelter for wildlife trees can help increase biodiversity and bring nature into the heart of our towns.

1.1.2 Health

- Most trees have a positive impact on the incidence of asthma, skin cancer and stress-related illness by filtering out polluted air, reducing smog formation, shading out solar radiation and by providing an attractive, calming setting for recreation.
- Patients in hospital rooms with a green view recover more quickly than those looking onto buildings, possibly because such views are soothing and invoke feelings of hope.
- Desk workers who can see nature from their desks experience 23% less time off sick and reported greater job satisfaction¹.
- The urban tree-scape improves public health, promotes relaxation and emotional well-being, and can thereby help to reduce healthcare costs.

1.1.3 Social

- Trees provide an attractive environment that encourages people to visit parks and open spaces for recreation, to take walks, or to use green cycle routes.

This, in turn, encourages social interaction, physical activity and a positive frame of mind.

- Trees can reinforce local character, distinctiveness and identity of an area, and provide a 'sense of place'.

Reference:

¹ Center for Urban Horticulture, 1998: Urban Nature Benefits: Psycho-Social Dimensions of People and Plants [Kathy Wolf Ph.D]

- Tree lined streets can help to improve road safety by giving the impression of narrowing which encourages slower driving. Trees planted along roadsides also provide a buffer between pedestrians and cars.
- Involvement in tree planting and care can bring people together, building a stronger sense of ownership and develop civic pride.

1.1.4 Economic

- Trees can increase property values by 7-15%².
- As they grow larger, the lift that trees give to property values increases proportionately.
- Trees can also help to provide an environment that is conducive to economic growth and in attracting investment.
- Trees create a positive perception of a place for potential property buyers.

1.1.5 Climate Change

It is now clear that trees are a key element of any urban climate change strategy. One of the best ways of making our towns and cities more hospitable in the coming decades is to increase the number, and size, of trees in our urban areas.

Trees help the response to the climate crises by capturing unavoidable emissions, improving air quality, absorbing pollutants, and helping to mitigate surface water flooding.

1.2 Why is an Amenity Tree Management Policy Required?

As Britain's first new town, Stevenage was designed with a great deal of emphasis on green space and its importance in helping to create a thriving community. Existing features such as hedgerows and lanes, woodlands and veteran trees were retained and used to create open space, wildlife corridors and an immediate sense of place and many of these features still exist today.

It is a sobering thought to realise that there are a number of trees throughout the new town that were growing before the car was invented. Whilst it is impossible to predict what form

Reference.

² CABE, 2004: Does Money Grow on Trees [CABE]

of transport will be in general use in another 100 years time, it is possible to predict that with safeguarding, good planning and care many of the trees we plant today could still be thriving.

The life span of many tree species is considerably greater than ours and consequently, without a coherent long term policy, our short term considerations are likely to adversely affect most of the trees within the town at some time during their life.

2. The Legal Context

The Council has a dual role to play in tree issues. Firstly, as an owner it is responsible for managing its own tree stock, and has a legal obligation to maintain them to ensure safety of the public and to consider as part of that obligation any surrounding buildings.

Secondly, the Council has a regulatory role to ensure the preservation of trees that offer high public amenity value, and also to ensure the provision of adequate green infrastructure in new developments.

2.1 Ownership of Trees in Stevenage

A tree is considered to be owned by the party on whose land the trunk of the tree stands.

The public trees within Stevenage are owned by:

Stevenage Borough Council 50%, and

Hertfordshire County Council 50%, (currently maintained by Stevenage Borough Council on the County Council's behalf).

The County Council covers the cost of all tree works on their land, including planned maintenance, necessary felling and new tree planting.

3. Strategic Context

There are a wide range of agencies and national documents that provide strategic context to tree management across the country and, as such, influence provision within Stevenage including:

- Woodland Trust: Emergency Tree Plan for the UK (January 2020)
- Defra: Protecting and Enhancing England's Trees and Woodlands consultation (December 2018)
- Defra: Tree Resilience Strategy (May 2018)

Local policies and initiatives that support the provision and management of trees include:

- Emerging Parks & Green Space Strategy
- Stevenage Biodiversity Action Plan
- Planning Policy
- Emerging Climate Change Strategy
- Stevenage Parking Strategy

4. The Current Position

In 2000 it was estimated that there were around 40,000 amenity trees in Stevenage. Today there are around 32,500 amenity trees in the town. The area of tree canopy cover can be linked to the benefits provided by the trees. The tree canopy cover in Stevenage (in 2016) was 17%. Tree canopy cover is 'the layer of leaves, branches and tree stems that cover the ground' (Treeconomics, 2017) when viewed from above.

One of the key recommendations from the Emergency Tree Plan for the UK (Woodland Trust, 2020) is to provide a minimum of 19% tree cover to support the UK being carbon neutral by 2050.

5. Policies

5.1 Amenity Tree Management

Around 50% of the town's present tree population is made up of Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*). These trees have proven their worth by developing to provide a distinctive and attractive tree-scape of considerable value to the towns overall landscape. The continued retention of this species along the major highways is therefore recommended. However, when considering planting trees close to existing properties it may be appropriate to consider the use of different trees, more suited to their location.

Policy 1: The Council is committed to the retention of a high quality extensive amenity tree stock throughout the town. This will be achieved by regular planned tree surveys and a cyclical tree maintenance programme.

The towns trees were all planted in quick succession which has led, in common with the other post war new towns, to the amenity tree stock of Stevenage being largely even aged. While planting in this way was necessary in order to establish a large amenity tree resource quickly and easily, it does mean that attention is required to ensure that there is a better ratio of young to old trees in the future. A programme of replacement planting will gradually help to address the problems associated with an even aged tree population.

It will also enable the tree stock to be retained in a healthy and safe condition for the benefit of the town's inhabitants and not leave future generations with a large stock of over mature trees with their associated dangers.

The former farmland trees and highway hedges retained during the building of the town are small in number but have an importance beyond their numbers. Their retention should always be sought where possible. For safety reasons extensive crown reduction and pruning is likely to become necessary and to this end regular inspection and a subsequent work schedule is recommended.

Policy 2: The Council is committed to managing its trees to ensure that the risk associated with the amenity tree stock is managed to be as low as reasonably practicable. Risk will be minimised through timely inspections and appropriate maintenance regimes.

The requirement for regular tree inspections comes from an obligation under the Occupiers Liability Acts 1957 and 1984. Inspections are a useful management tool to identify

potential hazards, reduce the risk of tree related damage, improve the quality of tree stock, and provide information to enable good decision making.

But it should be noted that no tree can be guaranteed to be safe³

The tree officer will arrange a survey of all Council tree stock every three years. If there is a higher risk of trees causing damage or harm, the tree officer should arrange for more regular, scheduled inspections which are recorded. The timing and frequency of inspections will depend on the age, species, size and condition of the trees, and the use of the land in which they are growing.

Inspection types vary and may include a basic visual tree assessment; an assessment of high risk target areas, such as town centres, where people and assets come into contact with trees; internal decay detection.

Policy 3: The Council will use its powers to make, and enforce, a Tree Preservation Order where it is expedient in the interests of amenity to make provision for the preservation of trees.

As the Local Planning Authority the Council has powers under provisions in the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act and the Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012, to make Tree Preservation Orders in order to protect to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity.

The Council can either initiate this process themselves or in response to a request made by any other party.

The law requires that written consent must be given by the Local Planning Authority (the Council) before any work to a protected tree is undertaken.

5.2 Routine Tree Maintenance Programme

A planned and cyclical programme of maintenance to the tree stock enables the Council to respond efficiently to any statutory works, and any other tree works identified as necessary, to provide the town's present, and future, residents with a well-managed, safe and attractive, amenity street tree resource.

Reference

³ National Tree Safety Group, 2011: Common Sense Risk Management of Trees

Policy 4: Tree maintenance works will be considered against the criteria set out below.

The Council is under no obligation to undertake tree works for any of the following reasons:

- Loss of light and/or reduced light to properties
- Effects on TV or mobile phone reception
- Obstruction of views
- Interference with private vegetation
- Obstruction of utility cables – these are the responsibility of the statutory provider, or cable owner.
- Minor or seasonal issues such as :
 - Honeydew (dripping sap)
 - Bird droppings
 - Squirrels gaining access to properties from trees
 - Leaf, fruit or flower fall
 - Smells generated by trees

Tree related enquiries will be assessed, by a qualified tree officer, against the level of perceived risk, each individual tree poses against the following criteria to determine whether or not intervention will be required:

- dangerous or unstable trees / branches likely to cause injury to a person(s)
- trees causing, or likely to cause, damage to property – see Policy 16
- trees obstructing the highway or footpaths
- trees obstructing streetlights and/or CCTV cameras
- other risk related works

Policy 5: The Council will encourage the highest standards of tree care and management by working in accordance with the latest guidance, and adopting best practice.

All requests relating to the planting, maintenance or felling of any tree on Council land in Stevenage will be submitted to Stevenage Direct Services for their consideration.

The Council ensures that it employs suitably qualified members of staff and / or contractors to ensure that the town's tree stock will be adequately managed and maintained.

Policy 6: The Council will take appropriate enforcement action in any instances of unauthorised works to Council trees, or arisings (including, but not exclusive to prunings and woodchips) from authorised works being fly-tipped on Council land.

Property owners are legally entitled to make private arrangements or organise the cutting back of any branches overhanging their property as long as the tree is not subject to a tree preservation order, and they dispose of the cuttings properly. The cutting back should only be as far as the fence or boundary line. Cuttings which are left on Council property will be considered as fly tipping and will be subject to appropriate enforcement action.

Undertaking other works to Council trees without the necessary permissions may constitute criminal damage. Any instances will be considered on a case by case basis and may be subject to legal action or financial charge to the responsible party for the damage caused and remedial works required to the tree as a result of the damage.

Policy 7: The Council will seek compensation from any resident or external organisation responsible for significant damage to, or removal of, any Council owned tree(s) to the value as calculated by CAVAT.

Valuing amenity trees is important for calculating loss of amenity and replacement value following wilful or negligent damage. The Council will utilise the Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees (CAVAT) approach, developed by Chris Neilan and the London Tree Officers Association (LTOA) in 2008, which is regarded as one of the principal methods of tree valuation in the UK. CAVAT provides a method for managing trees as public assets rather than liabilities. It is designed not only to be a strategic tool and aid to decision-making in relation to the tree stock as a whole, but also to be applicable to individual cases, where the value of a single tree needs to be expressed in monetary terms.

Policy 8: The Council maintains a presumption that all trees will be retained. However requests for tree felling, for trees that meet one or more of the criteria below, will be considered.

Trees give a sense of place and their removal should not be done lightly. It is only when a tree reaches and lives through a mature stage that the return on the investment made to plant and care for that tree is realised. Depending on species, it takes between 15 and 40 years for a tree to grow a sufficiently large canopy to deliver meaningful aesthetic, air pollution removal, rainwater management and other benefits. From a nature conservation perspective, the older a tree is the richer its wildlife. As a result, even when the planting of a new tree compensates for the felling of an older one, a significant loss is incurred.

Trees that are in an appropriate location, are healthy, strong and of a good form, and are not considered a potential danger to life or property should be retained. Consideration should also be given to retaining over mature or dead trees within parks where it is safe to do so, as these trees provide valuable wildlife habitats for bats, birds and invertebrates.

The removal of a tree will be considered if it:

- is considered dead;
- is considered dying or dangerous and cannot be practically managed in any other way;
- will benefit the development of adjacent trees;
- is proven, beyond reasonable doubt, to be the cause of clay shrinkage subsidence (Policy 17);
- has caused damage to, or is likely to cause damage to, adjacent structures where pruning is not an option;
- is a species which it is known will ultimately outgrow its location and in doing so unreasonably restrict the use of the area;
- stands in the way of essential development work such as road improvements, or corporate priorities such as residential development.

5.3 Tree Planting, Establishment and Design

The urban environment is often a difficult one in which to successfully establish trees. The demands for the space which the tree will inhabit are many (parking, housing, and people

for example), and these will often have a detrimental effect on the health of the trees at some time during its life.

Policy 9: The Council aspires to maintaining the town's tree cover at present levels, as a minimum. Annual replacement planting of all trees will need to be undertaken in sufficient numbers to achieve this goal.

Stevenage, with its wide grass verges and well maintained open spaces, offers a better environment than most towns, but even here it is estimated that less than 50% of newly planted trees will survive to maturity.

It therefore follows that, in order to achieve a similar level of tree cover across the town in the future, planting one new tree to replace a tree that has been removed will not be sufficient. The Woodland Trust advises that the minimum replacement planting ratios as being at least three new trees should be planted for every non-woodland tree that is removed (Emergency Tree Plan for the UK, January 2020).

Policy 10: The location and species choice of all newly planted trees will be carefully assessed against a range of criteria and in accordance with the current guidance, and best practice, in order to minimise conflict with residents and their property.

Most of the towns housing stock is founded on clay subsoil. The shrinkable nature of this subsoil ranges widely across the town from low to highly shrinkable. The location of any new tree planting must take account of this by adopting the recommendations of current standards.

Factors for identifying appropriate tree species, and suitable locations, will include:

- Function – the desired benefit(s) from the tree
- Character – the historic and landscape character of the area
- Diversity – the characteristics and profile of the wider tree population
- Design – the scale, balance, impact, texture and colour expected from the tree
- Site Constraints – including soil types, available space both above and below ground level, potential nuisance (pollens, blocking light to habitable rooms, sightlines for CCTV, street lighting), risk of damage to structures

- Support Capacity – the community’s aspirations as well as the long-term management and maintenance capacity.

The shading of properties can be particularly annoying to residents and care should be taken with the location of a new tree and its possible shading effect on habitable rooms and rear gardens. Other issues that generate concerns for residents are:

- Excessive leaf and fruit litter
- Bird, insect, squirrel, nuisance
- Interference with TV reception
- Conflict with essential services and street furniture
- Potential for subsidence

The benefits that trees bring to urban areas are proportionate to their size – in general large, mature trees bring more benefits than smaller ones. However, environmental benefits of trees must be balanced against the potential for nuisance that may be caused to local residents.

Stevenage is fortunate in having a large number of parks, open spaces and verges in which large growing tree species can be established and this opportunity should be exploited wherever possible.

Policy 11: The Council will require any new tree planting within, or adjacent to, hard surfaced areas to incorporate appropriate measures to provide a suitable growing environment for the tree whilst still providing a suitably engineered construction.

The largely impervious surface cover and the highly compacted soils make spaces such as streets, car parks and commercial areas difficult places for trees to establish and flourish. Soils under hard surface areas are compacted to meet load-bearing requirements and engineering standards. This will often stop roots from growing, causing them to be contained within a very small useable volume of soil without adequate water, nutrients or oxygen. In turn this will lead to trees growing poorly and dying prematurely. Trees that do survive will often interfere with the integrity of the surfacing around it.

A range of construction measures are now available which meet the load-bearing requirement for a structurally sound hard surface installation while also enhancing the amount of rooting space for trees, and encouraging root growth away from the footpath or hard surface.

Policy 12: The use of locally native tree species is to be encouraged, although it is recognised that a combination of native and non-native species will be important to the town's tree-scape.

The use of native tree species are usually best suited to the local environmental conditions, and will provide the most benefit to local native wildlife. Native trees will also provide a visual link to the land surrounding the town and greater integration between the landscape of the town and countryside. However, it is recognised that (a) climate change may impact on the future species choice, (b) there is a need for some diversity in the aesthetics of the landscape, and (c) enhancing ecological resistance to diseases requires a highly diverse local tree population.

5.4 Trees & the Community

As much of the tree stock in Stevenage is publicly owned it may seem to residents that they have little or no ownership of it. However, community involvement in our green spaces can generate a sense of ownership for local residents in their local environment. It can also engender a sense of pride in ourselves, each other and our town.

The Council is proud of its history of successful community engagement. With regards trees we engage with local communities through Co-operative Neighbourhoods, lead Green Space Volunteers, support local businesses, community groups and schools in tree related activity, providing advice to schools as requested, and notifying residents of significant planned developments in their local area.

Policy 13: Local residents will be advised about any significant planned tree works, within their local area, in accordance with current guidance and best practice.

Trees give a sense of place and their planting and ultimate removal should not be undertaken lightly. The involvement of local residents in the management and provision of their local tree stock should be recognised as something which will help people identify with, and value, their local environment and community. Although when responding to the need for emergency tree works it may not always be possible to notify local residents in advance.

Policy 14: The Council will support and encourage the development of volunteer activities associated with the town's tree-scape.

The Council delivers the “Green Space Volunteer” initiative in Stevenage. The initiative encourages and enables people to play an active role in conserving and enhancing their local green spaces.

Volunteers are offered opportunities to get involved in a range of activities including woodland management, habitat creation, and pond improvements. Volunteers may also assist with tree planting and reporting information about their local trees.

Policy 15: The Council will support and encourage young people, schools and young peoples’ organisations in the development of the town’s tree-scape.

With climate change being such an important subject there has probably never been a more important time for young people to be aware of, and involved in, their local environment. As the decision makers of tomorrow they need to understand how changes in the environment, even at a very local level, may affect them and how they can help to become involved in the issues and decisions that will ultimately affect them.

The involvement of Stevenage’s young people in the management of their local natural environment will be something that they can take pride in for years to come as they see their projects prosper and develop.

Policy 16: Opportunities for local residents, business and community groups to sponsor new tree planting and subsequent maintenance will be developed to encourage community pride in the local environment.

Encouraging residents to develop a sense of ownership can result in them appreciating the benefits of their local trees, and taking some pride in the continued good health of their local tree-scape. One way to achieve this may be to offer opportunities for the local community to contribute to their local tree-scape in partnership with the Council.

5.5 Trees and Buildings

Trees are large, they inhabit space both above and below ground, and can be easily damaged by ground works within influencing distance. Trees are increasingly the subject of litigation over claims of subsidence and damage to buildings. However, the incidence of subsidence in urban areas that is caused by trees is far lower than assumed.

Subsidence occurs on highly shrinkable clay soils. It is caused when the soil supporting some or all of a building dries out and consequently shrinks, which results in part of a building moving downwards. Trees, like all plants, lose water from the leaves through transpiration, but they are usually able to balance this loss by taking water from the soil by the roots. However, if a tree takes more water from the soil than is replaced by rainfall the soil will gradually dry out.

'Heave' is the opposite of subsidence. It occurs when shrinkable clay soil re-hydrates and begins to increase in volume, which results in part of a building being pushed upwards. Heave can also cause damage to buildings and is just as undesirable as subsidence.

Policy 17: Where a Council owned tree is alleged to be causing damage to a building, the Council will normally agree to, or permit, the removal of, or works to, the tree if sufficient evidence is provided to demonstrate that the tree is the primary cause.

If the tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order, or is within a Conservation Area, advice should be sought from the Assistant Director – Planning & Regulation.

To prove that it is the tree that is the primary cause of subsidence, or heave, the Council's tree officer will be provided with a technical report, from a suitably qualified and competent party, which includes evidence, taken over at least six months, of seasonal movement to the property. This evidence is required for claims relating to private property and Council buildings / assets.

The cost of claims for damage to private property as a result of Council managed trees over the past ten years has been considerable. However, this is heavily influenced by the weather during the previous year, and the effect that this has on both the tree and the surrounding soils.

Policy 18: The location and species choice of all newly planted trees will be undertaken to enhance the local area, and will take account of factors set out in 5.3.

Without sufficient foresight and adequate design, trees can and will cause damage to the built environment. This can occur through the action of their roots on the shrinkable clay subsoil found throughout the Stevenage area, through direct pressure by root branch and stem growth, and through the movement of the tree during high winds.

In order to maintain the town's tree cover at present levels, annual replacement planting of trees removed as a result of insurance claims will need to be carried out.

5.6 Trees & New Developments

The retention of suitable established landscape features, such as trees and hedgerows, and / or provision of new tree planting within a new development can create attractive open spaces, wildlife corridors and an immediate sense of place.

With the demand for greater numbers of housing (including affordable housing), both locally and nationally, there is pressure for residential development to deliver housing growth. If not managed correctly, this can be to the detriment of tree planting, which brings benefits to any new development, as described in 1.1.

Policy 19: Current British Standard guidance will form the basis of actions required to protect existing trees during periods of new, remedial or maintenance works to the built environment.

The Council recognises the benefits of an established and mature tree-scape and is therefore committed to improving the way that tree issues are considered in relation to applications for new development.

All new development proposals will be expected to take account of such trees and conform to the latest advice and recommendation on the development design, layout and construction. During the consultation process particular attention will be made to ensure that the proposal takes full account of the advice and recommendations made in the current British Standard guidance, including:

- BS5837 Trees in Relation to Construction
- BS3998 – Recommendations for Tree Work
- National Joint Utilities Group Guidelines for the Planning, Installation and Maintenance of Utility Apparatus in Proximity to Trees

Policy 20: The Council, working with partners, will ensure that appropriate new tree planting is fully incorporated within the design of the proposed new building(s) or highway related structure(s) at the outset.

It is important to create places that facilitate the co-existence of trees and structures. Trees can easily outlive most of the hard components found around them, such as benches, lamp posts, paving materials and even some buildings. Therefore consideration must be given to the needs of existing trees when planning and carrying out any new, remedial and/or maintenance works in the built environment.

Policy 21: All new developments will support new tree planting, either directly or through planning contributions, equivalent to a minimum 20% tree canopy cover at maturity as set out below.

| Development size | Minimum Tree Canopy Cover Contribution Requirement |
|-------------------|--|
| 1 - 3 dwellings | 20% Off-site contribution will be considered if on-site contribution is determined to be unachievable. |
| 4 - 10 dwellings | 20% Up to 50% of this contribution may be considered for delivery off-site, but must fall within the Stevenage borough boundary. |
| 11 – 30 dwellings | 20% 100% of this contribution must be on-site. |
| 31 - 50 | 30 % Up to 50% of this contribution may be considered for delivery off-site, but must fall within the Stevenage borough boundary. |
| 51+ dwellings | 30% 100% of this contribution must be on-site. |

Policy 22: Developers will be required to demonstrate that proposed new builds will incorporate the use of deeper, engineered foundations, as necessary to take account of the geology of the local area.

Building foundations require special attention to ensure that trees and buildings can co-exist without damage to either element of the street scene. This is of particular importance in areas of shrinkable clay soil where there is risk of subsidence, such as in Stevenage.

5.7 Dangerous Trees in Private Ownership

Policy 23: The Council will not be responsible for undertaking works to a privately owned tree except for exercising its legal powers under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

Trees in private ownership are the responsibility of the owner and the Council will not be involved in their management except where it has a statutory obligation to do so. The Council will give advice on suitable tree work, contractors and consultants as requested.

The Council has discretionary powers under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to give notice to the owner of a tree, deemed imminently dangerous, to take remedial actions. Where the specified safety works are not carried out, the Council may enter the land, carry out the works and reclaim any reasonable costs incurred from the land owner.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 does not enable the Council to become involved with private trees causing a nuisance to a neighbouring property by causing shade, blocking views or dropping leaves, flowers or fruit etc. unless the trees are imminently dangerous.

Under Section 154 of the Highways Act 1980 Hertfordshire County Council has discretionary powers to serve notice on the owners or occupiers of the land where shrubs, trees or hedges overhang, obstruct or are considered to pose a threat to the safety of users of the highway.

5.8 Environmental Responsibilities

Policy 24: The procurement of all trees for planting on Council land will be UK sourced and grown.

The biggest risk to biosecurity in the UK comes from the importing of trees and plants from elsewhere. Pests and diseases such as “Oak Processionary Moth” and “Ash Die-back” are associated with imported trees.

Policy 25: As far as is practical the material generated through the management and maintenance of the amenity tree stock will be disposed of in a sustainable manner.

Wood is a sustainable, renewable resource and every effort should be made to ensure that any arisings from tree and woodland management works are managed in a sustainable manner where possible.

The arisings from amenity tree management may take the form of:

- Timber
- Pulpwood or fencing
- Firewood
- Woodchip

The storage, preparation and supply of firewood is a specialised industry and some raw material from amenity tree works is sold to a firewood merchant.

It is estimated that tree works in Stevenage produce around 1,000m³ of woodchip annually. This product is used in Stevenage, as an informal surface on woodland paths, but a majority is sold on as fuel for power generating plants.

Policy 26: The Council will continue to review its purchasing policies with a view to providing equipment, and associated materials, that are environmentally friendly and improve the health and safety of arboricultural operators.

Arboricultural best practice states that it is preferable to undertake works to most deciduous trees during the winter months when the trees are dormant, although there are several exceptions to this. However, to manage a municipal tree stock effectively it is necessary to undertake works to trees throughout the year.

It is essential that consideration be given to the timing of works to avoid disturbance to nests and roosts of birds, bats and other wildlife. All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law, and it is therefore an offence to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built unless there is immediate risk to life or property.

The arboricultural industry is constantly seeking to provide equipment and materials that are safer; more efficient and easier to use; and are more environmentally friendly. The Council advocates sustainable procurement, and recognises the importance of the health and safety of its employees.

Appendix C

Summary of the Draft Policies

Policy 1: The Council is committed to the retention of a high quality extensive amenity tree stock throughout the town. This will be achieved by regular planned tree surveys and a cyclical tree maintenance programme.

Policy 2: The Council is committed to managing its trees to ensure that the risk associated with the amenity tree stock is managed to an acceptable level. Risk will be minimised through timely inspections and appropriate maintenance regimes.

Policy 3: Tree maintenance works will be considered against the criteria set out above.

Policy 4: The Council will encourage the highest standards of tree care and management by working in accordance with the latest guidance, and adopting best practice.

All requests relating to the planting, maintenance or felling of any tree on Council land in Stevenage will be submitted to Stevenage Direct Services for their consideration.

Policy 5: The Council will take appropriate enforcement action in any instances of unauthorised works to Council trees, or arisings from authorised works being fly-tipped on Council land.

Policy 6: The Council will seek compensation from any resident or external organisation responsible for significant damage to, or removal of, any Council owned tree(s) to the value as calculated by CAVAT.

Policy 7: The Council maintains a presumption that all trees will be retained. However requests for tree felling, for trees that meet one or more of the criteria above, will be considered.

Policy 8: The Council is committed to maintaining the town's tree cover at present levels, as a minimum. Annual replacement planting of all trees will need to be undertaken in sufficient numbers to achieve this goal.

Policy 9: The location and species choice of all newly planted trees will be undertaken in accordance with the current guidance, and best practice, in order to minimise conflict with residents and their property.

Policy 10: The Council will require any new tree planting within, or adjacent to, hard surfaced areas to incorporate appropriate measures to provide a suitable growing environment for the tree whilst still providing a suitably engineered construction.

Policy 11: The use of locally native tree species is to be encouraged, although it is recognised that a combination of native and non-native species will be important to the town's treescape.

Policy 12: Species choice for new tree planting will be carefully assessed against a range of criteria, but large canopy trees will be preferentially selected where appropriate.

Policy 13: Local residents will be advised about any significant planned tree works, within their local area, in accordance with current guidance and best practice.

Policy 14: The Council will support and encourage the development of volunteer activities associated with the town's treescape.

Policy 15: The Council will support and encourage young people, schools and young people' organisations in the development of the town's treescape.

Policy 16: Opportunities for local residents, business and community groups to sponsor new tree planting and subsequent maintenance will be developed to encourage community pride in the local environment.

Policy 17: Where a Council owned tree is alleged to be causing damage to a building the Council will normally agree to, or permit, the removal of, or works to, the tree if sufficient evidence is provided to demonstrate that the tree is the primary cause.

If the tree is protected by a Tree Preservation Order, or is within a Conservation Area, advice should be sought from the Assistant Director – Planning & Regulation.

Policy 18: The location and species choice of all newly planted trees will be undertaken to enhance the local area, and will take account of factors set out in 5.3.

Policy 19: All new developments will support new tree planting, within the Stevenage borough boundary, equivalent to a minimum 20% tree canopy cover at maturity. This may be achieved through planting with open spaces, road verges and private gardens within the development.

Policy 20: The Council, working with partners, will ensure that the design and positioning of any new building or highway related structure will take account of existing trees.

Policy 21: Developers will be required to demonstrate that proposed new builds will incorporate the use of deeper, engineered foundations, as necessary to take account of the geology of the local area.

Policy 22: Current British Standard guidance will form the basis of actions required to protect existing trees during periods of new, remedial or maintenance works to the built environment.

Policy 23: The Council will not be responsible for undertaking works to a privately owned tree except for exercising its legal powers under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

Policy 24: The procurement of all trees for planting on Council land will be UK sourced and grown.

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Meeting Executive Committee
Portfolio Area Environment & Regeneration
Date 20 January 2021



LAUNCH OF STEVENAGE CEMETERY POLICY

KEY DECISION

Lead Officer: Steve Dupoy, ext 2833
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members with a new policy for how the cemetery service in Stevenage will be delivered for the benefit of all visitors to enjoy, whether for remembering a loved one, or to simply take some time for quiet reflection.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive approves the Stevenage Cemetery Policy 2021, as set out at Appendix A.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council currently operates two cemeteries in Stevenage:

- Almonds Lane
- Weston Road

These sites are freely open to the public throughout the year.

In addition the Council also manages the closed churchyards of St Nicholas, Rectory Lane, and St Mary's, Shephall Green.

- 3.2 The burial grounds in Stevenage provide attractive, peaceful green spaces for all visitors to enjoy, whether for remembering a loved one or to simply take some time for quiet reflection.
- 3.3 The Council currently has a set of regulations in place for the two cemeteries, but does not have a policy that sets out or acts as the approved foundation for the specification of the services, and decisions that are made regarding their operation. A clear policy document will help manage expectations and set out clear service standards.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The cemeteries team work hard to support the bereaved and to accommodate requests from families and visitors.
- 4.2 However, the lack of a formal policy for cemeteries has, on occasion, created conflict and upset between visitors wishing to remember their loved one in their own personal way, and the Council who are responsible for the safe and sustainable management of the site.
- 4.3 This policy enables the future management of the cemeteries to be more clearly defined, helping to ensure a considered and consistent approach which will also help to manage expectations.
- 4.4 The Cemetery Policy (the Policy) sets out the principles of how the Council will manage the cemeteries to ensure that they are safe, accessible and sustainable, and the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders with an interest in the sites.
- 4.5 The Policy seeks to provide a balance between respecting the rights and choices of the individual, while also meeting the need for the providing safe and tidy cemeteries.
- 4.6 A summary of the changes from the current regulations is available in Appendix B, and includes:
- definitions of some of the legal terms and processes;
 - the Council will purchase and maintain memorial benches and provide opportunity for family / loved ones to purchase a plaque for 10 years, with the option for renewal of this agreement. This arrangement will make the option of a memorial bench more affordable for families;

- opportunity to sponsor a memorial tree chosen from a select list of species appropriate to the sites;
- clear guidance on who is considered a Stevenage resident, for the purposes of fees and charges;
- clarity on placement of flowers and other tributes;
- opportunity for Saturday burials / interments.

4.7 Officers are currently developing information to help raise awareness of the range of services available at Stevenage cemeteries, and to support residents / visitors in planning a funeral for themselves or a loved one.

4.8 Consultation on the new policy has been undertaken with:

- Legal services;
- Councillor Sharon Taylor, Leader of the Council
- Councillor John Gardner, Executive Member for Environment & Regeneration;
- the Portfolio Holders Advisory Group;
- Public consultation, via the Council's webpages (promoted via social media) during November / December 2020

All comments and feedback from the consultation has been considered and the draft policy amended as indicated.

4.9 Officers will implement the approved policy fully with all new internments and requests, but will provide a six month grace period for existing arrangements that do not meet the terms of the policy. This will help to avoid unnecessary anxiety for recently grieving families or friends during a sensitive time. It also provides a reasonable period of time for those that are not able to visit the cemetery on a regular or frequent basis.

4.10 The final policy will be made available on the Council's website and will be publicised on social media and within the cemeteries, to help to raise awareness. Updated information will be sent out with all correspondence regarding existing interments and burials at the sites.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

5.1 The cemeteries service costs the General Fund £199K per year to run based on the 2020/21 Original budget. The net cost of £199K includes £390K of expenditure

budget which is partly offset by £191K of budgeted income. In terms of the implementing the cemeteries policy, this can be delivered within current budgets.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 The policy is in accordance with the legislation which applies to burials and the management of cemeteries, i.e.:
- Local Government Act 1972
 - Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977
 - Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
 - Environmental Protection Act 1990
- 5.3 Benchmarking through the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), The Institute for Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and liaison with other local authorities has been used to inform this policy.

Equalities Implications

- 5.4 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached in Appendix C.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 In providing support to the bereaved officers want to ensure that there is a transparent and consistent approach to the placement of items on and around grave spaces. This will avoid:
- disrupting routine maintenance operations – for example plant pots, windmills and other ornaments placed over the grave space therefore preventing grass cutting operations, or risking damage to those items;
 - setting a precedent that is not sustainable – for example wind chimes in the trees, man-made items that break down on site but cannot be recycled;
 - causing litter within the site and the wider environs – full cans of alcohol, plastic ornaments that break up and scatter in the wind as they deteriorate for example.
- 5.6 The implementation of this policy may generate negative feedback from some visitors to the site.
- 5.7 Officers propose to implement the approved policy fully with all new internments and requests, but to provide a six month grace period for existing arrangements that do not meet the terms of the policy. In this way there is no expectation that recently grieving families or friends have to deal with further upset at a delicate time for them. It also provides reasonable time for implementation by those that are not able to visit the cemetery on a regular basis.

Staffing and Accommodation Implications

- 5.8 The policy states that a Saturday burial service will be offered subject to availability of staff, and subject to an additional fee.

Service Delivery Implications

- 5.9 The cemeteries team work hard to support the bereaved and to accommodate requests from family and visitors.
- 5.10 However, the lack of a formal policy for cemeteries has, on occasion, created conflict and upset between visitors wishing to remember their loved one in their own unique way, and the Council who are responsible for the safe and sustainable management of the site.
- 5.11 This policy enables the future management of the cemeteries to be clearly defined for all, ensuring a considered and consistent approach which will also help to manage expectations.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.12 The policy supports the Council's climate emergency through avoidance of the use of man-made materials on grave spaces that can deteriorate and contribute to littering.

APPENDICES

- A Draft Cemetery Policy
- B Summary of Changes and Additions to Current Practice
- C Equality Impact Assessment

Cemetery Policy

(Pictures to add)

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1. Introduction

The burial grounds in Stevenage provide attractive and peaceful green spaces for all visitors to enjoy, whether for remembering a loved one or to simply take some time for quiet reflection.

All visitors are welcome to our cemeteries and we ask that everyone respects the peace, dignity and reverence of these facilities, as well as other users, and we thank you in advance for your consideration.

This policy sets out the principles of how Stevenage Borough Council (the 'Council') will manage the cemeteries to ensure that they are safe, accessible and sustainable.

This policy seeks to provide a balance between respecting the rights and choices of the individual, while also meeting the need for providing safe and tidy cemeteries that everyone can enjoy.

2. Background

2.1 Cemeteries and Churchyards

The Council's cemeteries are open to the public 365 days a year.

The sites to which this policy relates are:

- Almond Lane Cemetery,
- Weston Road Cemetery,

2.1.1 Almond Lane Cemetery

This cemetery has both a traditional layout with full kerb-sets and lawn sections, which are divided into Established Church, Roman Catholic, and Dissenter or Non-conformist.

Almond Lane Cemetery also has:

- a natural burial ground for both burials and ashes interments
- Sanctums
- Garden of Rest
- Rose Gardens
- Shrub Gardens.

The Sanctums, Garden of Rest, Rose and Shrub Gardens are for ashes interments only.

2.1.2 Weston Road Cemetery

This is a lawn cemetery with sections divided into Established Church, Dissenter or Non-conformist.

Weston Road Cemetery also has:

- A Muslim section
- Children's section
- Gardens of Rest
- Rose Gardens
- Shrub Gardens
- Lawn Birches - an ashes scattering area.

The Garden of Rest, Rose and Shrub Gardens are for ashes interments only.

2.1.3 The Council also manage and maintain two churchyards in Stevenage:

- St Nicholas Churchyard
The Churchyard is immediately adjacent to the Weston Road Cemetery. It is a closed churchyard, meaning that there are no further grave spaces available for new burials.

St Nicholas Churchyard is designated as a Local Wildlife Site and the Council manages the grounds sympathetically to its status.

- St Mary's Churchyard
This is a closed churchyard, meaning that there are no further grave spaces available for new burials.

2.2 Legislation

There is a range of legislation which apply to burials and the management of cemeteries. The Cemetery Regulations, and this policy, are based upon legislation including:

- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977
- Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
- Environmental Protection Act 1990

2.3 Cemetery Records

All the statutory burial records for Almonds Lane and Weston Road Cemeteries are held at:

| | | |
|----------------------|-----|---------------------------|
| Weston Road Cemetery | and | Stevenage Borough Council |
| Weston Road | | Cavendish Road |
| Stevenage | | Stevenage |
| Herts. | | Herts. |
| SG1 3RP | | SG1 2ET |

A map is available to help in locating a grave or ashes plot.

3. Cemetery Etiquette

- 3.1 The burial grounds in Stevenage provide attractive, peaceful green spaces for all visitors to enjoy, whether for remembering a loved one or to simply take some time for quiet reflection.
- 3.2 All visitors are welcome to our cemeteries and we ask that everyone behaves in an appropriate manner:
- All visitors shall behave in a quiet, orderly and respectful manner
 - Visitors shall not cause a nuisance or interfere with any burial taking place or any grave or memorial
 - All visitors shall make full and appropriate use of the recycling facilities provided on site
 - No sports or games or discharge of firearms (unless at a military funeral) are permitted
 - Any person, who damages, defaces or destroys any property or causes a nuisance in the cemeteries may be prosecuted
 - Dogs are permitted in the cemetery grounds provided they are kept on a suitable lead and under control at all times. Owners, or handlers, must take full responsibility for their animal and must observe appropriate standards of behaviour and cleanliness
 - Dogs, with the exception of assistance dogs, or any other animals are not permitted in the cemetery buildings without the prior agreement of the Cemetery Officer.
 - Vehicles must not exceed 10 miles an hour and must use the one way system
 - Vehicles must not park on any grassed area
 - Vehicles may be prevented from entering the cemeteries during maintenance work
 - Children under 11 years of age must be accompanied by a responsible person
 - No demonstrations of any kind are allowed
 - Drinking of alcohol is prohibited within the cemetery buildings and grounds

4. Definitions

Making arrangements for the interment of a loved one can be highly emotional and stressful. In addition to the personal bereavement there are lots of legal terms and processes that need to be followed. Here we will try and provide some simple explanations of common terminology associated with interments.

4.1 Deed of Grant

The Deed of Grant is an important legal document and this should be stored in a safe place. It confirms that you are the current legal owner of the Right of Burial in a named grave.

The Deed of Grant (the 'Deed') needs to be produced when an interment takes place. Where this is not reasonably possible, any person whom the Council considers to be entitled to request that the grave may be opened may do so by making a Statutory Declaration and giving indemnity to the Council.

The Deed can be purchased at the time of arranging an interment or, in the case of a child's grave, it can be purchased after the burial has taken place.

The Council currently grants a Deed for a period of 50 years for graves and 50 years for ashes interments in the Garden of Rest.

It is the responsibility of the Deed of Grant holder to keep the cemetery office informed of any changes to contact details.

4.2 Exclusive Right of Burial

The Deed of Grant holder has the exclusive right to determine who can be buried in the grave space for which they hold the Deed.

Only the owner of the Exclusive Rights of burial, or their personal representative, can authorise the reopening of the grave space. This authorisation must be received in writing.

4.3 Transfer of Ownership

The Transfer of Ownership of a Deed of Grant for Exclusive Right of Burial is a legal process and is usually required when the owner of the grave space has been interred within the grave for which they hold the Deed.

No further burials, interments, memorials or changes to memorials are allowed until ownership has been transferred. The new owner must demonstrate ownership of the grave by producing:

- a will
- grant of probate
- letters of administration or a Statutory Declaration witnessed by an authorised court official, a Commissioner of Oaths, a magistrate or solicitor to prove that they are the next of kin.

A fee is payable for a Transfer of Ownership; if ownership is not transferred on the death of the owner, the grave space will be considered unavailable for further interments.

4.4 Notice of Interment

This is a Council document that is often completed by the funeral director. It sets out the details of the funeral, including date and time, details of the deceased, together with the status and details of the grave space.

The completed form must be returned to the Council at least 2 days (48 hours) prior to the funeral.

5. Management of Grave Spaces

Burials are only allowed in the designated areas.

5.1 Purchased Grave Spaces

Graves are allocated by section consistent with the plan of the cemetery; however there may be a choice regarding the position of the available graves and arrangements can be made to meet a member of staff to view available and appropriate graves.

5.2 Unpurchased Grave Spaces

An unpurchased grave, sometimes also known as a 'public' or 'common' grave, is where the Exclusive Right of Burial Grant has not been purchased and effectively remains with the Council.

More than one interment may take place in the grave, and maybe of unrelated persons.

The Council will place a small plaque on the grave space to identify the person(s) interred there. No memorials of any kind (including, but not limited to, planting, flowers, vases, crosses, pictures, kerbings) are permitted on non-purchased grave spaces and any such item may be removed without prior notice.

5.3 Flowers

Cemetery staff will remove all fresh flowers once they have withered, and will dispose of them through recycling.

6. INTERMENTS

6.1 Hours of Interments

6.1.1 Interments can take place between the following hours:

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| April – September | Monday to Friday | 9.30am – 2.30pm |
| October – March | Monday to Thursday | 9.30am – 2.00pm |
| | Friday | 9.30am – 11.00am |

6.1.2 Burials may also be possible on a Saturday, subject to availability of cemeteries staff, and will incur an additional charge.

6.1.3 The appointed times for funerals must be strictly observed to prevent inconvenience to other funerals.

Late arrivals may incur additional charges and the funeral may have to be postponed or rearranged. Any funeral arriving at a time other than that appointed, must act under the Council's directions.

6.2 Funeral Directors

6.2.1 Funeral directors must observe the "Instructions to Funeral Directors" issued by the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities, or other authorised instruction.

6.2.2 Funeral directors are responsible for arranging sufficient bearers to carry and lower the coffin in a dignified and reverent manner. The Council is unable to supply additional bearers.

We understand that family members, and friends often wish to assist with this and we respect that decision. Any mourners who do assist with the bearing or lowering of the coffin do so at their own risk.

6.3 Certificates

6.3.1 A Registrar's / Coroner's Certificate (for burials) or Certificate of Cremation (for ashes) must be presented, by hand, to the overseeing Council Officer in advance of the interment taking place.

The certificate should not be sent through the postal system, and the Council will not accept any liability for certificates sent by post and subsequently lost.

- 6.3.2 No burial will be permitted within the cemetery grounds without the Registrar's / Coroner's Certificate (for burials) or Certificate of Cremation (for ashes).

6.4 Notice of Interment

- 6.4.1 A completed Notice of Interment (the 'Notice') must be received not less than two working days before the day the burial is due to take place.
- 6.4.2 The Notice must be signed by the grave owner or their personal representative. The Council will not accept responsibility for the accuracy of the details contained in the Notice of Interment.
- 6.4.3 The Council will not accept verbal instructions.
- 6.4.4 Once the Notice has been accepted no alteration to the arrangements will be allowed, with the exception of the time of the burial. In this case, notice should be given to the Council at least 24 hours before the original time of burial is due to take place.

6.5 Interment Vessels

- 6.5.1 The Council will only accept coffins or caskets for interments; shroud burials are not permitted.
- 6.5.2 A nameplate should be fixed to each coffin or casket.

6.6 Attendance at Interments by Officials

- 6.6.1 An interment can take place with or without a religious service. It is the responsibility of the bereaved family or the funeral director to arrange for an appropriate authorised person to officiate at the burial.
- 6.6.2 The Cemeteries Team will accommodate all faiths, and their beliefs / needs, where possible and practical to do so.
- 6.6.3 Weston Road Cemetery provides a dedicated Muslim section. Where possible there should be a nominated Muslim community representative present to ensure the smooth running of all Muslim burials.

6.6.4 There will be a Council officer present at every funeral to oversee the delivery of the interment. They will maintain a discreet presence to ensure that everything is in place.

7. BURIALS

7.1 Pre-Burial Preparation

- 7.1.1 A grave space subject to an Exclusive Right of Burial would usually be expected to allow up to three interments.

It is traditional to have one burial interment in each Muslim grave and the Council will respect this tradition. If the family would prefer a deeper grave for two or three burial interments this must be made clear at the time of booking the first interment.

Occasionally soil or ground conditions may necessitate a reduction in the numbers of interments. The Council will not accept liability or responsibility in these circumstances.

More than one burial at any one time in a grave will need to be authorised by the Council, and authorisation is required for each interment.

- 7.1.2 When any grave is re-opened for another burial, no person shall disturb or remove any human remains already interred.

- 7.1.3 Graves can only be excavated by someone appointed to do so by the Council.

- 7.1.4 Prior to a funeral the grave will be excavated and dressed with artificial matting.

The excess soil may be placed on the nearest adjacent area. Space restrictions sometimes mean this may be another grave space. Where this is the case, grave adornments will be removed, the grave covered prior to placement of the soil, and the area reinstated following the burial. The grave owner or the family will be informed wherever possible.

- 7.1.5 The cemetery staff will have a discreet presence at the burial to ensure that everything is in place.

7.2 Post Burial Arrangements

- 7.2.1 Once the mourners have left the graveside the grave will be back-filled. The Council's cemetery staff will return the soil to the grave.

7.2.2 We understand that families and mourners may wish to return the soil to the grave themselves and spades will be provided to support this.

Great care should be taken to ensure that mourners are not injured whilst returning the soil to the grave, and therefore up to four people may do this at any one time.

7.2.3 Once the soil has reached the appropriate level within the grave the cemetery staff are required to remove the support shoring from around the top of the grave. At this time the family and mourners will be politely asked to step back from the area momentarily whilst this is carried out. They will be advised when they are able to continue the back-fill safely.

7.2.4 The soil on the grave will be left mounded to allow for natural settlement in the weeks following the interment. When settlement is complete, the Council will level the soil and grass seed the grave space.

7.2.5 On completion of the back-filling, the cemetery staff will tidy the area and remove any excess soil.

7.3 Grave Space Maintenance

7.3.1 The Council will maintain the lawn area of all graves. However, the owner (with the Deed of Grant) is responsible for the management and maintenance of any memorial on the grave.

7.3.2 In order to ensure access for ease of maintenance, grave space owners are permitted to place fresh, seasonal plants and flowers within 150mm (6 inches) of the front edge on the memorial foundation at the head of the grave. Owners are encouraged to maintain this area themselves in order that the Council's cemetery staff does not have to disturb any items in the course of their maintenance activities.

No other items are allowed on and around the grave space.

7.3.3 Fresh floral arrangements will be removed from all graves when they have withered, and these will be disposed through recycling.

7.3.4 Any item(s) placed outside the permitted area will be removed without prior notice.

7.3.5 Any items left on a grave, are left at the owners risk; the Council does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage to those items.

- 7.3.6 The Council may remove any material or inscription on the grounds of taste, decency or possible offence to any person, faith or community.

7.4 Children's Section

- 7.4.1 The Children's Section at Weston Road Cemetery is available for interments of children aged up to 16 years.
- 7.4.2 Memorials in the children's area will be subject to approval, and permanent memorials may only be erected where the Grant of Exclusive Right of Burial has been purchased.

7.5 Natural Burial Glade

- 7.5.1 The Council manages (the Glade) to provide an alternative to the more traditional style of burial spaces. The grass within this space will not be kept short at all times, and may therefore appear more wild and natural at times.
- 7.5.2 We understand that families may wish to plant a tree on each grave or ashes plot. However, this is not appropriate as trees need a space to establish and grow to their full potential.
- 7.5.3 Any new tree planting will be undertaken at the discretion of the cemetery team, and the species will be chosen to suit the location.

In accordance with best practice, trees will be planted during the winter months, when the trees are dormant.

- 7.5.4 Only single depth interments are available within the Glade.
- 7.5.5 Biodegradable coffins, caskets, and their linings, including, but not limited to, cardboard, wicker or soft woods, shall be accepted in this burial space.

Ashes may be buried within this area, or scattered loose.

- 7.5.6 The Council requests that bodies are not embalmed due to the possible pollution caused by introducing formaldehyde to the soil. We understand that this may sometimes be unavoidable but request that Funeral Directors inform the cemetery team in advance so that due consideration can be given.

- 7.5.7 The only items that may be placed on the burial spaces in the Glade are fresh cut flowers. All cellophane, ribbons and non-biodegradable wrapping must be removed.
- 7.5.8 Cemetery staff will remove all fresh flowers when they have withered, and will dispose of them through recycling.
- 7.5.9 No other items (including, but not restricted to, vases, crosses, wind chimes and trinkets) are permitted to be placed on or around the trees or burial spaces. The Council reserves the right to remove any items, without prior notice.
- 7.5.10 Any items left on the graves and ashes plots are left at the owners risk and the Council does not accept any responsibility.
- 7.5.11 The Council reserves the right to remove any trees that are not flourishing in order to allow others to develop to their full potential.

8. ASHES

8.1 Pre-Interment Preparation

8.1.1 A grave space subject to an Exclusive Right of Burial would usually be expected to allow up to a maximum of six interments of ashes within each grave space.

A Children's section grave will hold up to two interments of ashes.

A Garden of Rest plot will hold up to two interments of ashes.

A Memorial Rose or Shrub Garden plot will hold up to two interments of ashes.

A Sanctum will hold up to two ashes interments.

Occasionally soil or ground conditions may necessitate a reduction in the numbers of interments. The Council will not accept liability or responsibility in these circumstances.

More than one interment at any one time will need to be authorised by the Council, and authorisation is required for each interment.

8.1.2 When any grave is re-opened for another burial no person shall disturb or remove any human remains already interred.

8.1.3 Graves can only be excavated by someone appointed to do so by the Council.

8.2 Garden of Rest

8.2.1 The Garden of Rest is an area set aside solely for the interment of cremated remains. A maximum of two interments, and one memorial, are permitted to each plot.

8.2.2 The memorial will be affixed to the base slab provided by the Council.

8.2.3 No other items are permitted in the Garden of Rest, and any item placed there may be removed without prior notice.

- 8.2.4 Memorials in the Garden of Rest will be subject to approval and permanent memorials may only be erected where the Grant of Exclusive Right of Burial has been purchased.
- 8.2.5 Any items placed in the Garden of Rest are left at the owners risk and the Council does not accept any responsibility.

8.3 Memorial Rose & Shrub Gardens

- 8.3.1 These Gardens are set aside solely for the interment of cremated remains. A maximum of two interments, one rose or shrub, and one name plaque are permitted to each plot.
- 8.3.2 A list of available roses and shrubs, and a list of plaque inscriptions, will be provided for the families to choose from. The Council will determine the planting position in the gardens.
- 8.3.3 No other items are permitted in the Memorial Rose & Shrub Gardens, and any item placed there may be removed without prior notice.
- 8.3.4 A replacement rose, shrub or plaque can be provided on request. A fee may be payable for this service.

8.4 Sanctums

- 8.4.1 Sanctums (above-ground ashes vaults) may be leased from the Council for a period of 15 years.
- 8.4.2 The lease holder has the right for their ashes to be placed within the ashes vault, space permitting, during the period of the lease.
- 8.4.3 All caskets / containers shall be of a non-biodegradable material and must not exceed 305mm (12 inches) in height.
- 8.4.4 A floral tribute of freshly cut flowers may be placed in the flower vase provided.
Cemetery staff will remove all fresh flowers when they have withered and will dispose of them through recycling.
- 8.4.5 No other items are permitted on, or around, the ashes vault and any item placed there may be removed without prior notice.

- 8.4.6 Unauthorised items placed on or around the ashes vault may cause damage or staining to the stone work. Should any unauthorised items cause damage or staining, the lease holder will be responsible for the cost of cleaning or replacing the memorial vault.
- 8.4.7 The lease of the ashes vault may be renewed for an additional 15 years. The Council will contact the lease holder prior to the lease period ending, using the contact details on file. The renewed lease will be payable at the fees appropriate at the date of renewal.
- 8.4.8 If the lease is not renewed, the lease holder may arrange for the ashes to be collected from the Cemetery Office, or elect for them to be scattered within the Lawn Birches area at Weston Road Cemetery. The inscribed tablet can be collected from the Cemetery Office at Weston Road.
- 8.4.10 Six months prior to the end of the lease period the Council will endeavour to make contact with the lease holder to establish future arrangements. However, if the Council is unable to make contact, or in the absence of any instructions, both the cremated remains and the inscribed tablet will be removed, and the cremated remains will be scattered within the Lawn Birches area at Weston Road cemetery. The inscribed tablet will be removed and disposed of.
- 8.4.11 While the Council will make all reasonable efforts to make contact with the lease holder(s) from the details provided, it is the responsibility of the lease holder(s) to ensure the lease is renewed. The Council will accept no responsibility for action taken in the absence of ownership.
- 8.4.12 Where the lease is held in joint names, on the death of one owner, the Rights automatically transfer to the surviving named lease holder.
- 8.4.13 Upon the death of the sole lease holder, the person who has been nominated to assume responsibility must inform the Council giving their full details including contact information.

8.5 Lawn Birches

- 8.5.1 This area, at Weston Road Cemetery, is set aside solely for the scattering of cremated remains.
- 8.5.2 Scattering is only permitted from the original crematorium container, or from a scattering urn provided by the Council. For the latter, the ashes shall be given

to the Cemeteries Officer in advance of the booking date so that they can be transferred into the scattering urn.

8.5.3 Fresh cut flowers are permitted within this area, but any cellophane, ribbons and non-biodegradable wrapping must be removed.

8.5.4 Cemetery staff will remove all fresh flowers when they have withered, and will dispose of them through recycling.

8.5.5 No other items are permitted within the Lawn Birches, and any item placed there may be removed without prior notice.

8.5.6 Once the ashes have been scattered an exhumation is not possible.

9. Memorials

Memorials are only permitted on purchased grave spaces. No memorial is permitted on an un-purchased area without the Council's written consent.

Kerbstones, border stones, fencing, and marble, glass or stone clippings are not permitted in the lawn sections of the cemeteries.

The following items are not permitted to be left anywhere within the cemetery grounds:

- glass vases or any other glass item
- food and drink, including alcohol
- fencing, edging or borders of any kind
- any item deemed, by the Cemeteries Team, to be offensive or dangerous
- any item placed in or on trees

Temporary wooden markers or crosses can be placed at the head of a purchased grave until such time as a permanent memorial is erected. The marker must not exceed 914mm (3 foot) in height and 456mm (1 foot 6 inches) in width and can be inscribed with the name of the deceased and their birth and death dates.

9.1 Installation of Memorials

9.1.1 Before any monument or stone is erected, repaired or any inscription is cut or altered, an application must be made to the Council, a permit received and approval granted. Memorial masons will not be permitted to work in the Council's cemeteries without the necessary approvals being in place.

9.1.2 Fixing or removing memorials is only permitted Monday to Friday 7:30am – 4.00pm.

9.1.3 Only Memorial and Stone Masons registered with, and meeting the standards of, the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) or the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) are permitted to erect memorials within the Stevenage cemeteries. This also applies to memorials being reinstated after their removal to permit an interment or to allow for additional inscriptions.

- 9.1.4 As a minimum standard all memorial work, including fixing, shall be carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice of the BRAMM Blue Book, NAMM Code of Working Practice and British Standards, BS 8415, current at the time of fixing.
- 9.1.5 Any new memorial must have the grave number and section clearly and conspicuously engraved upon the base in figures not more than 20mm high. Only the name of the stonemason may be cut in a similar position in letters not more than 15mm high. The Council will arrange for any memorial not inscribed in this way to be removed, and the costs recharged to the holder of the Deed of Grant.
- 9.1.6 Masons are required to liaise with the Cemeteries Officer prior to undertaking any works on site.
- 9.1.7 Masons are requested to remove all spare soil or other materials and leave the ground to the Council's satisfaction. They will be responsible for any damage done by them or their workmen. All work must be completed in a timely way without disturbance to other graves, and the mason may not leave the site until the installation of the memorial is completed.
- 9.1.8 The Council reserves the right to refuse any inscription on the grounds of taste, decency, or possible offence to any person, faith or community.

9.2 Memorial Safety and Upkeep

- 9.2.1 The maintenance and upkeep of all monuments and headstones is the responsibility of the Deed of Grant holder. The Council requires that monuments and headstones be kept in good and safe repair at all times.

The Council will undertake a survey of every memorial to ensure that they are in a stable condition and do not pose any immediate danger to visitors and staff working in the cemeteries.

- 9.2.2 At least every five years a visual and stability check will be undertaken. If significant movement of a memorial is detected, or it is deemed unsafe, the memorial will be laid down for safety reasons and we will endeavour to contact the grave owner to inform them.
- 9.2.3 The Council will not be held responsible for memorials damaged through any cause whatsoever, nor for any injury or damage caused by them. Adequate insurance cover should be taken out by the grave owner at the time of purchase and current at all times.

9.3 Types of Memorials

9.3.1 Lawn Sections

All memorials in the grave sections of Weston Road Cemetery and the lawn sections of Almond Lane cemetery (Sections - BB, H, G and K) must be a headstone or cross-type memorial, of marble, granite or nebresina, not exceeding 914mm (3 foot) in height (including the base), 761mm (2 foot 6 inches) and 101mm (4 inches) deep.

9.3.2 Almond Lane

Headstones and Kerbstones in Sections A, B, C, D, E, F, FF, G and R must be a maximum area of 2,135mm (7 foot) x 915mm (3 foot) for an adult grave space, and 1,220mm (4 foot) x 610mm (2 foot) for a child's grave space.

Planting is permitted within these graves.

9.3.3 Garden of Rest

A base slab, approximately 510mm (20 inches) x 455mm (18 inches), will be provided by the Council. One memorial is permitted. The memorial will not exceed 455mm (18 inches) high x 405mm (16 inches) wide x 75mm (3 inches) deep

The base stone will not exceed the dimensions of the base slab and should be no more than 50mm (2 inches) thick. 510mm (20 inches) x 457mm (18 inches) x 50mm (2 inches) thick.

9.3.4 Memorial Walls

The memorial walls are placed around the rose and shrub gardens where memorial plaques and flower vases can be placed in memory of loved ones.

The plaque and flower vase will be placed on the wall for a period of 5 years with the option to renew for a further period.

The Council may remove any material or inscription which is deemed to have fallen into disrepair.

Any items left on the memorial walls are left at the owners risk and the Council does not accept any responsibility.

9.3.5 Memorial Benches

The Council will purchase and locate memorial benches and these will be maintained by the Council.

Plaques may be purchased and installed to a memorial bench for a period of 10 years, with the ongoing option to renew the agreement.

No items are to be placed on or around the memorial benches and any such item may be removed without prior notice.

Maintenance of memorial benches privately purchased, through historical permissions, are the responsibility of the purchaser. When staining the bench the purchaser must use a dark oak stain, and warning notices must be in place until such time as the stain / treatment has completely dried.

The Council will undertake regular inspections of all memorial benches, and any that are deemed unsafe will be removed. All reasonable efforts will be made to inform the purchaser if a bench is removed.

9.3.6 Memorial Trees

Families can sponsor a tree to be planted in either of our cemeteries and a list of appropriate species and suitable locations will be provided.

Cemeteries staff will liaise with the sponsor to agree the location of the tree, but due to the layout and ongoing management of the cemeteries, it may not be possible to deliver the preferred location of the sponsor.

The cost of a memorial tree includes the supply of the chosen tree, planting and the first year's maintenance, including watering. Families are encouraged to water the tree when they are on site to assist with the trees establishment and health.

In accordance with best practice, trees will be planted during the winter months when the trees are dormant.

The Council will not accept responsibility or liability in the case of a tree being damaged or dying, unless this is shown to be due to negligence by the Council.

Damaged memorial trees we will be replaced during the next planting season. This may require a further payment to cover cost and maintenance of the new tree.

Dedication of a memorial tree does not give the donor any right to determine or influence the future management of the specific tree in any way. Should the memorial tree become a risk to property or people, removal will be considered, although all options will be explored to avoid this.

No items are to be placed on or around the memorial tree other than the authorised memorial plaque. Any item(s) placed there may be removed without prior notice.

9.3.7 Memorial Plaques - Trees

Plaques dedicated to a loved one shall be purchased from the Council either in conjunction with a Memorial Tree or to be placed at the foot of an existing tree in either of the cemeteries.

The price of the plaque will be given upon application, as the price may vary due to the length of the inscription.

If the plaque should deteriorate the cemetery team can arrange for a replacement, and a fee may be charged.

9.3.8 Book of Remembrance

There is a Book of Remembrance at both the Weston Road and Almond Lane cemeteries.

The current day's entries will be on display at all times.

The inscription will be the full name of the deceased and the date of their birth and death, and may be entered on any date requested.

In addition to the standard inscription it is possible to include an entry of short verse. The verse can be up to four lines in length, with a maximum of 32 letters per line.

10. Climate Change

- 10.1 On 12 June 2019, the Council declared a climate emergency and reconfirmed its long standing commitment to tackling climate change.
- 10.2 As part of the climate emergency, the Council has set a target to be net carbon neutral by 2030.
- 10.3 The cemeteries team already make use of electric hand tools in their maintenance of the sites.
- 10.4 Future operations and provision of replacement tools, plant and equipment will seek to deliver a carbon neutral service by 2030.

11. Chapel Services

- 11.1 The chapel is situated at the Weston Road Cemetery and comfortably seats forty (40) people.
- 11.2 Chapel services are booked for the duration of one hour, exceeding this time may result in additional charges.
- 11.3 The Council provides a CD player and a docking station, but families or ministers are welcome to bring their own sound systems if they prefer.
- 11.4 Families should make contact with the Cemeteries Officer, in advance, if the Council provided music systems are required, to enable to the testing of the music in advance of the service.
- 11.5 There is also a selection of hymn music available on CD, and copies of hymn books can be made available for the congregation.

12. Exhumation

- 12.1 Exhumation means the removal from the ground of a body or cremated remains. Any disturbance of remains is deemed to be an exhumation. It is unlawful to disturb any human remains (including any cremated remains) without first obtaining the necessary legal authority.
- 12.2 Once a body or ashes remains have been interred, they can only be removed with permission from the Burial Authority and with a licence granted by the Ministry of Justice.
- 12.3 If the remains are in consecrated ground then permission must be obtained from the Diocesan Court.
- 12.4 An Environmental Health Officer and Cemetery Officer shall be present at all exhumations and will supervise the event to ensure that respect for the deceased person is maintained and that public health is protected.
- 12.5 If the conditions of the licence cannot be met, or there are public health or decency concerns, the exhumation may not proceed.

13. Fees and Charges

- 13.1 Fees are set by the Council, and are reviewed and approved annually. Current fees and charges are available on the Council's website at www.stevenage.gov.uk or from the Cemetery Office.
- 13.2 All payments are required in full in advance of the service being provided, unless a funeral director is arranging the funeral.
- 13.3 There is a separate pricing list for non-residents of Stevenage. A resident is considered to be:
- a permanent occupier of a residential property within the borough of Stevenage or a payer of council tax to Stevenage Borough Council at the time of their death.
 - someone who purchased the grave whilst living in the borough or is the spouse of a resident
 - someone who left the borough in the past two years for the purposes of receiving care, nursing or education
 - a person who has no other place of abode and passes away within the borough – in relation to interments to un-purchased graves only.
- 13.4 Only in very exceptional circumstances the Assistant Director, with responsibility for Cemeteries, may approve a request to waive the non-resident fee.
- 13.5 Any coffins or caskets which exceed 1,067mm (42 inches) in width will be charged the equivalent of double burial fees.

APPENDIX B

Summary of Changes and Additions

| Current | | Future | |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Weston Road Lawn Cemetery Graves | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no kerbstones, items of any kind or planting permitted on or within the graves | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been an unwritten rule that families could have the first 150mm (6") to place items of their choosing. However, overtime this has allowed unsuitable material and items to be placed not only within the 150mm but beyond this point | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are permitted to place fresh, seasonal plants and flowers within 150mm (6") at the front edge of the concrete foundation. Owners will be encouraged to maintain this area themselves so that staff do not need to disturb any items in the course of their maintenance activities | |
| 2. Grave/ Plot Ownership | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Grant of Exclusive Rights was only briefly mentioned and families were just told you have to have one. This blanket regulation left families unsure of what they were paying for and why | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy offers more detail on what a Grant of Exclusive Rights is, what it means for families and their responsibilities, and gives confirmation that it can be transferred | |
| 3. Memorials & Memorial Masons | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current explanatory leaflets make no mention that grave/plot numbers should be present on all memorials. This is not best practice and makes Topple Testing (in compliance with the Health & Safety Executive guidance) and finding graves/plot much harder for staff, memorial masons and families which in turn can lead to grave/plot errors. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All new memorials must have the grave/plot number and section clearly and conspicuously engraved upon the base. | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The name of the memorial mason is permitted in letters not more than 15mm high. | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We reserve the right to remove any memorial not inscribed in this way and the costs recharged to the holder of the Grant of Exclusive Rights | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the responsibilities of the memorial masons while working within our cemeteries | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation that the Council will not be held responsible for memorials damaged through any cause whatsoever, nor for any injury or damage caused by them. | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advice regarding adequate insurance cover for memorials | |
| 4. Memorial Benches | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are able to purchase a memorial | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will purchase all benches | |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| | bench and plaque in memory of a loved one | | and have full control on their positioning and maintenance. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an over-abundance of benches in the cemeteries, many of which are falling into disrepair and prohibit proper maintenance of the areas. In some instances the benches cause an inability to dig graves due to their position. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families can purchase a renewable (every 10 years) memorial plaque which can be fixed on a bench. We can facilitate 4-5 plaques on each bench. This makes this option more affordable for everyone, and helps to control the number of benches around the sites. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not all families are able to fund a whole bench themselves, and we no longer have the space available to facilitate benches in such large numbers. This puts many families at a disadvantage, as benches are permitted on a first come, first served basis | | |
| 5. Memorial Trees | | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is not an advertised service, but families were given permission to plant a memorial tree if they enquired, and with little guidance from the cemetery team. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer families the opportunity to sponsor a tree chosen from a select list of appropriate species to be planted at pre-determined locations. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is now a mixed collection of tree species in the cemeteries and not all are suitable to the ground conditions or the planting location. As the families purchased the trees there is an expectation that they can do as they wish with the tree and memorialisation on the branches has been difficult to manage. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance is provided on how the Council will manage these trees; that sponsorship does not give the donor any right to determine or influence the management; and that other than the supplied memorial plaque no other items are to be placed on or around the tree. |
| 6. Fees & Charges | | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-residents are subject to triple fees | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No guidance/explanation on what we consider a resident to be, leading to some confusion with the public and Funeral Directors | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the policy sets out the criteria of what/who the Council considers a resident to be |
| 7. Behaviour & Legislation | | | |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance as to appropriate behaviour of visitors |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is and is not permitted |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief details of legislation on which the policy is based. |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanation of 'technical' terms in layman's language |
| 8. Floral Arrangements/Tributes | | | |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cemetery staff will remove all flowers once withered and reinforce that they shall be disposed of through recycling |
| 9. Saturday Burials and Ashes Interments | | | |
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new service offer subject to availability of staff, and subject to an |

| | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|---|---|
| | | | additional fee. |
| 10. | Funeral Directors | | |
| | | • | To operate within the guidance of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities |
| | | • | Their responsibilities within our cemeteries |
| | | • | Their responsibilities during a funeral |
| 11. | Burial and Ashes | | |
| | | • | Information and guidance relating to each of the burial/interment services we offer |
| | | • | Information regarding pre-burial preparation and post burial arrangements |
| | | • | Clarification that graves can only be excavated by someone appointed by the Council |
| | | • | Advice regarding the number of mourners backfilling a grave at any one time |
| | | • | Information regarding the numbers of burials/ashes that can be placed in the different plots |
| | | • | Guidance on what is and is not permitted on or within the plots |
| | | • | The Council may remove any material or inscription on the grounds of taste, decency or possible offence |
| | | • | Unauthorised/non-permitted items may be removed without prior notice |

APPENDIX C:

Full Equality Impact Assessment

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

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| What is being assessed? | | Cemetery Policy 2021 | | | |
| Lead Assessor | Claire Skeels | | | Assessment team | Claire Skeels Lloyd Walker |
| Start date | January 2021 | End date | Open | | |
| When will the EqIA be reviewed? | | Annually | | | |

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Who may be affected by it? | Stevenage Residents, Mourners, Visitors, Staff, Funeral Directors |
| What are the key aims of it? | To provide a clear policy to show how the cemetery service in Stevenage will be delivered, our service standards and to inform our residents and customers what they can expect. |

| What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| Remove discrimination & harassment | Any and all will be welcome to use and benefit from the burial/ashes/memorial /commemorative options we have available | Promote equal opportunities | Any and all will be able to use and benefit from the burial/ashes/memorial/ commemorative options we have available | Encourage good relations | Any and all will be able to use and benefit from the burial/ashes/memorial /commemorative options we have available |

| | |
|---|---|
| What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment? | • |
|---|---|

In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?

- The aim of the policy is to ensure all grieving families are treated respectfully & equally whilst maintaining individual and cultural beliefs.

Evidence and impact assessment

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

| Age | | | | | |
|--|---|-----------------|--|----------------|------|
| Positive impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designated Children's section for under 16's • interment services FOC to all babies/children under the age of 16 if they or their parent/s are residents of Stevenage. • Former residents who left the borough within the past two years for the purposes of receiving care, nursing or education will be not be subjected to the non-resident triple fees and charges. | Negative impact | None | Unequal impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | • | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality | Promote the full range of services available | | What do you still need to find out? Include in | | |

| | | | |
|----------------|--|---------------------|--|
| and inclusion? | | actions (last page) | |
|----------------|--|---------------------|--|

| Disability | | | |
|---|--|--|------|
| e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness | | | |
| Positive impact | None | Negative impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No discrimination, the burial/ashes plots and fees & charges are the same for all Stevenage residents Disabled parking bays are provided at Weston Road Disabled toilets are provided at both cemeteries If the staff are made aware that a wheelchair user is coming to a burial or interment every possible effort will be made to ensure full access is granted where possible e.g. tracks used over grass, obstructions cleared, vehicle access | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the full range of services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Gender reassignment | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|------|
| Positive impact | None | Negative impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No discrimination, the burial/ashes plots and fees & charges are the same for all Stevenage residents | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Marriage or civil partnership | | | |
|--|------|---|------|
| Positive impact | None | Negative impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No discrimination, the burial/ashes plots and fees & charges are the same for all | |

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--|--|
| you used to support this assessment | Stevenage residents | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Pregnancy & maternity | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|------|----------------|------|
| Positive impact | None | Negative impact | None | Unequal impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No discrimination, the burial/ashes plots and fees & charges are the same for all Stevenage residents | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | | | |

| Race | | | | | |
|--|--|---|------|----------------|------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | None | Unequal impact | None |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All burial intricacies associated with race are honoured where practical and safe to do so | | | | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No discrimination, the burial/ashes plots and fees & charges are the same for all Stevenage residents | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality | Promote the services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in | | | |

and inclusion?

actions (last page)

Religion or belief

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|------|----------------|------|
| Positive impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim burial section of cemetery is offered, fees & charges are the same for all Stevenage residents • All burial intricacies associated with religions or beliefs are honoured where practical and safe to do so • The chapel is non-denomination and available to all | Negative impact | None | Unequal impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | • | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the full range of services available through local places of worship | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | | | |

Sex

| | | | | | |
|--|------|---|------|----------------|------|
| Positive impact | None | Negative impact | None | Unequal impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | • No discrimination, the burial/ashes plots and fees & charges are the same for all Stevenage residents | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|------|
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |
| Sexual orientation e.g. straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual | | | |
| Positive impact | None | Negative impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No discrimination, the burial/ashes plots and fees & charges are the same for all Stevenage residents | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------|---|----------------|--|
| Socio-economic¹ e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users | | | | | |
| Positive impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We offer a range of interment options with varying costs Public Health Burials can be arranged for anyone without family or whose family are unable to manage the associated costs | Negative impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We do not offer a payment plan, all costs must be paid in advance of an interment | Unequal impact | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | | | |
| What opportunities are | Promote the services available | What do you still need to | | | |

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

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| there to promote equality and inclusion? | | find out? Include in actions (last page) | |
|--|--|--|--|

| Other | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|----------------|------|
| please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts | | | | | |
| Positive impact | Any and all are welcome to make use of our interment and commemorative options | Negative impact | Former residents are subject to triple fees regardless of how long they lived in the borough prior to leaving | Unequal impact | None |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We welcome all visitors and anyone may request a burial or ashes interment within our cemeteries, however they will need to pay triple fees if the deceased was not a Stevenage resident when they died unless they are exempt as detailed above. | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | Promote the services available | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | | | |

What are the findings of any consultation with:

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|------------|--|
| Staff? | | Residents? | |
| Voluntary & community sector? | | Partners? | |
| Other stakeholders? | | | |

Overall conclusion & future activity

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

| Detail the actions that are needed as a result of this assessment and how they will help to remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities and / or encourage good relations : | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------|----------|---|
| Action | Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage? | Responsible officer | Deadline | How will this be embedded as business as usual? |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Approved by Assistant Director:

Date:

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

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area Economy, Enterprise and Transport
Date 20 January 2021



FUTURE TOWN, FUTURE TRANSPORT STRATEGY– 12 MONTH REVIEW

KEY DECISION

Author David Hodbod | 2579
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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Members on progress of the projects included within the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy (adopted October 2019)
- 1.2 To make Members aware that the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy will be reviewed on a quarterly and annual basis due to its status as a key strategy that sits underneath the Future Town, Future Council Corporate Plan.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Executive note the progress with projects included within the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy
- 2.2 That Executive note that the Future Town, Future Transport Strategy will be included within the quarterly Future Town, Future Council monitoring reports.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In October 2019, the Council adopted Future Town, Future Transport (FTFT), a transport strategy for Stevenage. FTFT outlines the Council's approach to sustainable transport. It establishes the key local transport issues and opportunities that exist in Stevenage, and sets out a vision and a series of objectives for what will be delivered in the future. The strategy focuses around four key themes:
- 1) Connectivity
 - 2) Living Streets
 - 3) Active and Healthy Travel
 - 4) Green Travel
- 3.2 The benefits of sustainable transport are numerous. Amongst many other benefits, the reduction in vehicle emissions will improve air quality and help with the fight against climate change; the use of active transport will increase the health and well-being of residents; the reduced domination of cars will improve the environment of our destinations and residential streets; and the use of alternate forms of transport could help individuals save considerable amounts of money. It is therefore a key priority of the Council which is more important than ever when considering the changes to working and leisure practices caused by the Covid-19 restrictions experienced over the past 12 months. These restrictions have promoted an apparent increase in recognition, seen nationwide, that active transport can form an easy and beneficial part of everyday life, either for commuting or for general exercise.
- 3.3 The substantive element of FTFT is a list of identified future transportation projects which provides for coordinated action by a range of agencies and institutions for all forms of transportation that are used in the town: car, train, bus, cycling and walking.
- 3.4 Many of the schemes within FTFT are outside the control of the Council and many require third party funding from a range of sources including, but not limited to, Hertfordshire County Council, housing developers, central government and public transport providers. The Council therefore plays an important lobbying role in addition to delivering its own schemes to deliver a complementary range of projects that will combine to create a long-term modal shift in transportation use.
- 3.5 FTFT was the Council's first Transport Strategy, building on a range of other transport-related documents, including the Mobility Strategy and Cycling Strategy, as well as other documents such as the Local Plan (adopted 2019) and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which contain sections on transportation.
- 3.6 The Executive asked for the strategy to be reviewed 12 months after its adoption.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

Recommendation 2.1: That Executive note the progress with projects included within the Future Town, Future Transport

- 4.1 FTFT contains 25 individual transportation projects to be implemented or progressed in the short term (2019 to 2022). The following paragraphs and Table 1 give a brief overview of the key milestones achieved this year and the expected targets for next year. The rest of the section gives a description of the progress since October 2019 for each of the projects listed in FTFT.

Highlights from October 2019 – October 2020

- 4.2 Sustainable Transport continues to be a key priority for the Council and for the wider Hertfordshire area. The outbreak of Covid-19 prompted a renewed focus on sustainable transport as employees of most sectors have been encouraged to work remotely and there has been restricted use of public transport. Encouraging signs can be seen nationwide that there has been an increase in walking and cycling and the Government has been keen for local authorities to install emergency measures to promote active travel. The Government has also recently announced funding for the installation of more permanent measures and the Council has worked closely with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) when identifying what schemes to seek funding for.
- 4.3 Whilst Covid-19 has had an effect on the delivery of some schemes, there has been significant progress in many important projects during this time, as explained briefly below, and in more detail throughout the remainder of this section.
- 4.4 The Council has made progress delivering flexible office space in the town centre as part of the North Block development to provide a place for residents to work locally, reducing the need to travel further afield to their usual workplace.
- 4.5 The Hertfordshire Growth Board has continued to attract investment for infrastructure into the County. Projects on the A414 and A602 are being delivered to ease East-West movement and this will help to ease congestion in Stevenage as a result.
- 4.6 Work with HCC and the Local Enterprise Partnership remains ongoing and a bid was submitted in October 2020 to receive significant funding towards sustainable transport projects through the Government's Town Fund. The 'Town Investment Plan' includes proposals for cycling and pedestrian connectivity (including upgrading of existing cycleways), the A602-Gunnels Wood Road roundabout scheme, and enabling works to the station gateway which could include feasibility work with Network Rail for a regenerated station. The proposals were endorsed by the Stevenage Development Board, which includes a number of local leaders and stakeholders, including multiple businesses.
- 4.7 Network rail completed works at Stevenage Rail Station, installing a fifth platform that will serve the local Hertford Loop leaving more capacity on Platform 4 to provide additional mainlines services.

- 4.8 The Council approved planning permission for the relocation of the town centre bus station, to create a new bus interchange closer to the railway station to form an important sustainable transport hub. This will enable multi-part journeys to be taken entirely on sustainable forms of transport as well as providing an improved environment to users.
- 4.9 The Council became the only authority in Hertfordshire to publish a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which identifies the priority improvements to the borough's cycling and walking infrastructure to ensure that active transport routes are complete, direct, and high quality. The Council also secured the future delivery of extensions to the cycle network from housing developers through S106 agreements.
- 4.10 The Council adopted a new Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD which identifies areas where new developments will be required to provide a reduced amount of parking in order to promote more sustainable modes of transport.
- 4.11 The Council finalised a new Workplace Travel Plan to promote sustainable travel for its own employees. This builds on the previous Green Travel Plan adopted in 2013.
- 4.12 The Stevenage Annual Cycling Festival was affected by the Covid-19 restrictions but the Council managed to run a number of remote events successfully during the week commencing Monday 24 August 2020, with virtual and socially distanced rides taking place throughout the week.

Table 1 – Key FTFT Milestones

| | Key progress | Delivery Body |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Significant milestones 2019-20 | Rail Station platform 5 completed and opened | Network Rail |
| | New Bus Interchange designed and granted planning permission | SBC and HCC |
| | Stevenage accepted onto the HCC Sustainable Travel Town programme | SBC and HCC |
| | Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document adopted | SBC |
| | Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan finalised and published | SBC (with support from HCC & DfT) |
| | Workplace Travel Plan finalised | SBC |
| | Agreed funding for North Road cycle scheme from EATF (Tranche 2) subject to consultation | HCC/DfT |

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Progress Due 2020-21 | Parking Strategy set to be adopted | SBC |
| | Construction of new bus interchange and bus priority measures on Lytton Way | SBC and HCC |
| | Delivery of extensions and improvements to cycleway network | HCC and housing developers |
| | Stevenage cycle hire scheme set to be procured | SBC with partner organisations |
| | Rail Station (Stevenage Gateway) Area Action Plan set for production and adoption | SBC |
| Delays / Risks | A1(M) Smart Motorway scheme postponed until 2025 | Highways England |

Designation of Stevenage as a Sustainable Travel Town

- 4.13 The Council submitted an initial application to be included in HCC's Sustainable Travel Town (STT) programme in August 2019. Following a Covid-19-enforced delay to the assessments, in August 2020 HCC requested that all applicants agree to a number of criteria to help the assessment process. The criteria included infrastructure-, planning-, parking-, and highways-related issues. Criteria included removing free-parking in town centre locations, supporting the improvement of cycling routes through town centres, promoting parking-free developments where possible, and in general to support the reallocation of road space to replacement bus/cycle/HOV lanes at the expense of cars. The Council agreed to the majority of the criteria.
- 4.14 In October 2020, HCC Councillors on the Growth, Infrastructure, Planning and Economy (GRIPE) Cabinet Panel approved to accept Stevenage onto the STT programme alongside Letchworth and Royston. Whilst all submissions were seen to have strong merit, these three submissions scored best through the assessment and were included in the inaugural programme.
- 4.15 The STT programme will serve to promote the relationship between SBC and HCC and instigate the holistic delivery of a collection of transport schemes to cause a significant modal shift in the borough.
- 4.16 Discussions between the councils are due to start early in 2021 to determine what schemes will be delivered as part of the programme, with the aim of finalising the full programme by summer 2021 for implementation over the next year. Schemes could be selected from those already identified in the emerging HCC North Central Growth & Transport Plan, the SBC Local Plan, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, FTFT, the SBC Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan and/or the SBC Cycling Strategy.

- 4.17 The programme will also enable the council to further demonstrate the importance it is placing on sustainable transport when submitting bids for third party funding. This should subsequently increase our likelihood of gaining funding for schemes, both on and outside of the STT programme.

Living Streets Pilot Projects

- 4.18 The Living Streets concept is designed to reduce the prevalence of parked vehicles in residential streets. Stevenage has a history of residential parking issues because the original new town design underestimated the growth in personal car ownership, and the limited use of rear, en-bloc garages. Measures to reduce parking and maximise the use and enjoyment of streets could be wide-ranging with minimal precedent examples.
- 4.19 The Council undertook a consultation with residents across the whole of the borough in 2019 to identify general themes and preferences that could be included in trials for Living Streets. This information was passed onto the Community and Neighbourhood Management Team who were due to undertake more targeted and face-to-face engagement in two wards to identify specific trials that could be undertaken to re-imagine and re-design existing streets with significant parking issues. However, progress has been limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.20 Parking spaces have been removed and replaced with increase cycling parking in the High Street as part of the Department for Transport's Emergency Active Transport Fund, but the future aim is to implement this kind of intervention more widespread within residential areas.
- 4.21 Planning officers have been promoting the concepts of Living Streets to be embedded into the masterplan designs for several of the strategic housing sites currently progressing towards/through the planning system. Key elements of the Living Streets concept have also been included in the Council's emerging Parking Strategy (more detail in paragraph 4.64) which is due to be adopted in summer 2021 and will contain the Council's policy related to on-street parking for the period up to 2031.

New Bus Interchange

- 4.22 Planning and Development Committee granted planning permission for the relocation of the town centre bus station in June 2020. This was a crucial step for sustainable transport in the town and also enables progress with the town centre regeneration scheme which was subsequently granted resolution to approve at Planning & Development Committee in October 2020. The new bus interchange will be located closer to the train station, forming a sustainable transport hub to enable multi-part journeys to be taken entirely on sustainable modes of transport more easily.
- 4.23 The new interchange will be future-proofed to enable electric busses to charge on-site, will have safe bicycle parking and will provide a more comfortable and modern waiting environment for passengers. The new facility will also include a café and shop mobility store as key services to users.

- 4.24 The scheme also includes bus priority measures along Lytton Way which will help to enable wider ambitions to integrate the leisure park and Gunnels Wood Road with the town centre and enhance sustainable east-west connections.
- 4.25 Pre-commencement conditions are in the process of being discharged, and due to the ability to undertake some of the works as Permitted Development, work started on-site in autumn last year.

SBC Workplace Travel Plan

- 4.26 The SBC Workplace Travel Plan was finalised and approved by SLT in 2019 to replace the Green Travel Plan adopted in 2013. The Plan contains a range of measures to improve sustainable transport by the Council's workforce.
- 4.27 Capital funding was approved by Cllrs to implement measures within the Plan with £15k per annum available in 21/22, 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

- 4.28 The Stevenage LCWIP was finalised with support from the Department for Transport and HCC and published late in 2019. LCWIPs are identified in the Government's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Strategy as a key tool to identify strategic cycling and walking improvements at a local level.
- 4.29 Stevenage BC is the only authority in Hertfordshire with a published LCWIP and other authorities are now following suit and seeking SBC advice to progress with their own versions.
- 4.30 Since its completion, officers have been using the LCWIP as key evidence when identifying priority interventions that could be delivered by external bodies and are seeking funding for improvements. Officers have been on site visits with HCC to identify potential schemes to be delivered by HCC and interventions on Routes 1, 2, 3 and 7 are currently going through HCC's Project Validation process.
- 4.31 HCC is currently focussing its considerations on funding and delivering routes away from the town centre, improving routes to and from the edges of town.
- 4.32 Significant stretches of Route 1 and Route 6 from the LCWIP are due to be secured by Section 106 agreements linked to major planning applications. HCC was awarded funding to deliver a scheme for another part of Route 1, between the High Street and Corey's Mill Lane, by Tranche 2 of the Department for Transport Emergency Active Travel Fund [EATF], subject to the outcome a public engagement exercise to be undertaken by HCC.
- 4.33 An unexpected bonus of the LCWIP has been its use by HCC to identify and support improvements on the Rights of Way network, not just on the highway/cycleway network. Recent examples include the progression of bids to fund schemes along St Nicholas Park, north of Chells Pavilion, and connected to Tintern Close.

Cycle Hire Scheme

- 4.34 The Council has ambitions to introduce a cycle hire scheme to ensure that lack of access to a bike is no longer a barrier to cycling. Officers have been in correspondence with Watford BC who recently implemented a cycle hire scheme. WBC recommended that the first step should be ask specialists to undertake a feasibility study in the town to see roughly what the market is for a scheme, what the requirements of a Stevenage scheme are, and to identify approximate numbers and locations for potential bikes and docking stations. This work will ensure that subsequent procurement of a bike supplier is sufficiently specific to our needs and will make assessment of tenders easier and more transparent.
- 4.35 Consultants were appointed in spring but delayed by the Covid-19 lockdown which prevented them from undertaking site visits. They have now completed their report which identifies that a scheme should be feasible in Stevenage but should be implemented in two or three phases, starting with a focus on the west of town, covering Lister Hospital, Gunnels Wood Road, the Town Centre, the Rail Station and nearby residential areas, before latterly expanding eastwards to cover the rest of the borough.
- 4.36 The study advises that improvements to cycling access through the town centre and on the High Street, two of the key destinations within the borough, would help the viability of any potential scheme.
- 4.37 The Council intends to start a procurement exercise seeking bike and scooter suppliers to present their best solution to the needs of Stevenage, as identified by the study. Procurement is expected to start early in 2021. The Council would also look to engage local business, perhaps through the SmartGo Stevenage organisation, to promote delivery partnerships or sponsorship opportunities as the scheme would require significant third party funding, potentially in addition to what a chosen bike supplier would provide. A final scheme would be proceeded with subject to the findings of a detailed business case.

Parking Standards SPD

- 4.38 The adoption of the Local Plan in 2019 committed the Council to review its parking requirements to ensure that parking requirements matched modern policy to promote a reduction in car use. Parking requirements had been set out in the Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document (adopted 2012).
- 4.39 Having been through statutory consultation and procedures, the Council adopted the new Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD after a decision by Executive in September 2020. The SPD promotes much reduced car parking in the most accessible areas of town, as well as an increased level of cycling and Electric Vehicle parking. As an SPD document, it is now a material consideration for all planning applications submitted to the Council.

New Developments

- 4.40 Since the adoption of the Local Plan in 2019, and the subsequent adoption of FTFT, the council now expects proposals for residential or non-residential

development to place emphasis on sustainable modes of transport as a priority instead of privately-owned car use. This involves placing new developments in sustainable locations, providing high quality off-road links to key services and providing links to the existing cycle ways and pedestrian routes, to ensure that cycling and walking is easier for short journeys than driving. This can be achieved by a wide range of innovative designs.

- 4.41 The Council is due to secure the future provision of large extensions to the cycleway network linked to the North Stevenage and East Stevenage developments as well as significant contributions to improve passenger transport. This will continue to be a focus of planning officers.
- 4.42 The Council will also be producing a new Supplementary Planning Document related to Developer Contributions which will give further clarity regarding policy requirements for sustainable transport measures.

Town Centre Regen, SBC and delivery partners

- 4.43 Progress with the town's £1bn major regeneration programme continues. The detailed planning application for Phase 1 of the scheme, and outline planning application for the rest of the scheme, was submitted in December 2019. Planning & Development Committee resolved to grant the scheme permission in October 2020. Proposals for cycling and walking links are included in the proposals, as is reduced vehicle parking provision in line with the updated Parking Provision & Sustainable Transport SPD.
- 4.44 Other schemes within the town centre, such as those on Queensway and the Forum, are also being delivered or are progressing through the planning system. They propose to introduce new residents to the town centre and promote the use of sustainable transport instead of cars.

Intalink Bus Strategy

- 4.45 The Intalink Bus Strategy was completed and agreed by all pan-Hertfordshire stakeholders to promote consistent ticketing across the county and to create greater simplicity for county-wide users by upgrading bus infrastructure, prioritising bus services and using data and information more smartly.
- 4.46 SBC officers successfully bid for Stevenage to be one of just three towns that planning consultants reviewed to identify the potential for bus priority measures in 2019. As an outcome of this, a major bus priority scheme, involving reallocation of road space for bus lanes, is currently being progressed by HCC from the A1(M) junction 8 roundabout. This will make bus travel to the town centre less susceptible to congestion and more reliable at peak times as a result.

Bus User Enhancement

- 4.47 As previously mentioned, the Council granted planning permission to relocate the town centre bus station and this will create a much improved environment for bus users, as well as being closer to the rail station to make multi-mode journeys easier.
- 4.48 Funds were made available by central government to trial all-electric bus fleets (All Electric Bus Town and All Hydrogen Bus Town Fund), however,

these were only open to Local Transport Authorities. The Council asked HCC to investigate the opportunity to submit a bid on our behalf but this was not forthcoming and the Council remains reliant on bus service providers to gradually introduce electric vehicles to their own fleet.

Maintenance and Improvements to pedestrian and cycleway network

- 4.49 As previously mentioned, the SBC Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan was published this year, identifying the priorities for improvements on the existing cycling and walking network. Officers have already begun using it in discussion with infrastructure providers to fund and/or deliver some of the interventions identified within the LCWIP.

Removal of mopeds from Stevenage cycleways

- 4.50 Officers have lobbied HCC to amend the Traffic Regulation Orders which contain a Prohibition of Driving Order that exempts mopeds from being banned on the cycleways. It was discovered that the Prohibitions' description of mopeds includes the term 'having a second means of propulsion' (ie. pedals) which is a historic design concept no longer used by modern mopeds. As such, this effectively means that mopeds are already illegal on the cycleway. However, the signage on much of the cycleways is outdated so enforcement cannot be carried out against modern mopeds even though they are technically illegal.
- 4.51 HCC committed to undertaking an investigation to determine whether it would indeed be safer to remove mopeds from the cycleways or keep them separate from larger motorised vehicles on roads, and if the results are positive, re-write the TRO's and replace the signage on the cycle ways. However, the legal procedures and costs involved in implementing these changes across the whole borough are significant and it is likely that it will be done on a ward-by-ward basis over a number of years.

Re-evaluate use of powered vehicles on cycleways

- 4.52 This is likely to be something considered in more detail if Stevenage is accepted on to the HCC Sustainable Travel Town programme and will focus on the use of electric bikes and electric scooters.

5th Platform at Stevenage Station

- 4.53 The 5th platform at Stevenage Station was completed by Network Rail in July 2020. The construction of a dedicated platform for services on the Hertford Loop will free up capacity for stopping mainline services.
- 4.54 The new platform has its own disabled access and will allow local/regional trains to terminate at Stevenage, reducing pressure on Platform 4.

Railway Station improvements

- 4.55 The main progress at the station has been related to the aforementioned new 5th platform to support local services on the Hertford loop and free up capacity on Platform 4 for main line services.

- 4.56 In addition to this, due to the disruption experienced by passengers using the Thameslink and Great Northern routes following the timetable changes of May 2018, Govia Thameslink Railway set up the Passenger Benefit Fund. This Fund aimed to directly fund improvements at stations that would improve the experience of the train users affected by the timetable changes. The Council worked closely with HCC through the consultation period to identify priority schemes. GTR are now responsible for delivering the improvements.

Extend contactless payment to Stevenage

- 4.57 The Council has lobbied HCC, through their representations to the emerging HCC Rail Strategy, to ensure that the promotion of a wider roll-out of contactless payments becomes a priority across the county. HCC, in its role as Local Transport Authority, leads on the development of transport policy across Hertfordshire and is a key body to help lobby Transport for London and/or Network Rail to extend London's contactless/Oyster car functionality to those locations linked to, but not part of, the capital.

Stevenage Gateway – Area Action Plan

- 4.58 The Local Development Scheme was updated in September 2020 to give further detail to the production of the Rail Station Area Action Plan (AAP). The Council committed to producing the AAP to enable the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to release the Local Plan from its 18 month Holding Direction following Examination in 2016/17.
- 4.59 The AAP will expand on the policies within the Local Plan for the area around the Railway Station and on Lytton Road, providing more detail for future development of the area which is currently an underwhelming and underutilised welcome to the town when travelling by train. The AAP is now scheduled for Adoption in January 2022 with several rounds of consultation and a formal Examination process over the coming year.

A1(M) Smart Motorway

- 4.60 Highways England had previously committed to upgrade the section of the A1(M) within Stevenage, one of the ten busiest stretches of the route from London to Leeds, through the implementation of a SMART Motorway. This would have included the use of the hard shoulder and introducing variable speed limits.
- 4.61 The Council had previously stated its preference for other means of improving capacity, considering the SMART Motorway design to be unsafe. At a meeting of the Full Council in January 2020, Councillors passed a motion opposing the roll-out of Smart Motorways and challenging Government to come up with alternative proposals to cut congestion on the A1(M).
- 4.62 Further correspondence with Highways England and the Secretary of State for Transport, as well as responses to the public consultation event which followed the widespread reporting of the dangers of SMART Motorways has resulted in the project being paused. The Council received a letter from Highways England in August 2020 stating that Highways England will focus

their time and resources on implementing stocktake actions on their existing smart motorways, both those that are currently open and those that are well into their construction. The survey work that has already been undertaken on the A1(M) SMART Motorway project will be used when they restart the project, which is scheduled for 2025.

Promote Electric Vehicle Use

- 4.63 The new Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD requires, developers in Stevenage, for the first time, to provide EV charging points on their developments and to install the underlying cabling for future charging points. The Council's own emerging Parking Strategy will similarly promote EV-use by the provision of EV facilities on the Council's own public parking.

Parking Strategy

- 4.64 The Council is responsible for much of the public parking in the borough and committed to update the 2004 Parking Strategy. The emerging strategy (The Stevenage Parking Strategy 2021-2031 – Living and Sustainable Streets for Stevenage) was approved for public consultation at the December meeting of the Executive prior to its expected adoption in summer 2021. Parking is always an emotive subject and the new Strategy has the difficult task of supporting local residents, businesses and employers, whilst also considering the need to transition away from privately-owned vehicles to more sustainable modes.
- 4.65 Whilst the aforementioned Parking Provision & Sustainable Transport SPD focuses on new developments, the emerging Stevenage Parking Strategy will become the overarching policy for public parking provision. It will therefore set out approaches that are in line with SBC's Co-operative Council Commitment to engage with the community and relevant stakeholders in managing parking.

Stevenage Travel Choice Business Endorsement

- 4.66 The promotion/creation of a Travel Choice Business Endorsement is likely to progress once a cycle hire scheme is in motion when the Council is likely to engage businesses with promoting the scheme.

Cycle Training and Education

- 4.67 HCC continue to undertake cycle training and education within schools as part of the Bikeability programme. In addition to this, SBC and the Police have put a renewed focus on raising awareness of the town centre cycle ban and anti-social riding more generally.

Electric Bike Hire Scheme

- 4.68 An electric bike hire scheme could become part of the initial bike hire scheme which the council is aiming to start procurement for in autumn 2020. It is likely that for a scheme to be successful in Stevenage, it will need to encompass a range of mechanical and electric bikes as well as electric scooters to provide for the range of journeys that would likely be undertaken by such a scheme.

- 4.69 Electric bikes would be more beneficial to latter phases of a bike hire scheme, perhaps focussing on longer, commuter journeys from the east of the town, but it is also likely that an ideal scheme would include some electric bikes (and electric scooters) for shorter journeys as part of early phases which concentrate on promoting sustainable travel between the key destinations in the west side of the town.

London Luton Airport Expansion

- 4.70 London Luton Airport Limited (LLAL) had been preparing to apply for a Development Consent Order for a significant expansion of the current airport operation. Consultation on the proposals had already commenced and LLAL had already held engagement events (including in Stevenage) prior to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions commencing.
- 4.71 The DCO application has not progressed to Examination, as had previously expected by this point, in part due to the Covid-19 restrictions on hosting public events, but also due to the reduction in air travel brought about by the restriction, and the impact this has had on the aviation industry.
- 4.72 LLAL have recently reported that the overarching theme of responses to the first formal consultation was the effect of the proposed increase on climate change. As such, they are set to make changes to the scheme to further limit the proposal's impact and ensure that climate change remains a legacy focus of the development once through the DCO process. Further details are due imminently.

Recommendation 2.2: That Executive note that Future Town, Future Transport will be reviewed quarterly and annually as part of the Future Town, Future Council monitoring.

- 4.73 Progress with the overall FTFT strategy will be monitored and reported as part of the corporate monitoring duties related to Future Town, Future Council (FTFC). The FTFC reports will highlight progress or issues with any relevant scheme from FTFT and will identify risks that could affect future progress.
- 4.74 Not all FTFT schemes are expected to be delivered at the same time, and many transport projects have long timeframes for delivery. The quarterly monitoring reports will focus on the schemes that are progressing at that specific time, allowing for a more targeted snapshot of what is occurring, whilst the annual report will enable a broader, more overarching, summary of progress.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 The costs associated with this report have been met from the agreed departmental budget.
- 5.2 Any potential schemes that are mentioned in Future Town, Future Transport will need to be subject to a business case and/or will require third party funding.

Legal Implications

- 5.3 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.
- 5.4 The legal ramifications of any potential schemes mentioned in Future Town Future Transport will need to be considered at the point of planning and delivery.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 Any proposed changes to the highways network included in Future Town, Future Transport would be assessed by the HCC Safety Audit Team prior to their implementation.

Policy Implications

- 5.6 There are no direct policy implications associated with this report. As a key Council strategy, sitting beneath the Future Town, Future Council strategy, progress with FTFT will be reported as part of the corporate FTFC monitoring

Climate Change Implications

- 5.7 Future Town, Future Transport seeks to drastically increase levels of active and sustainable transport as alternatives to the use of privately-owned vehicles. As transportation currently accounts for such a high proportion of the town's carbon emissions, FTFT has the potential to have significant positive impacts on climate change.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.8 Future Town, Future Transport seeks to improve accessibility in Stevenage for all types of transport, promoting walking, cycling and public transport, not just privately-owned cars. The promotion of other forms of transport should have a positive impact on the equalities and diversity implications of transportation.

Community Safety Implications

- 5.9 Any proposed changes to the highways network included in Future Town, Future Transport would be assessed by the HCC Safety Audit Team prior to their implementation.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e. they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:

- BD1 [Future Town, Future Transport \(2019\)](#)
- BD2 [Stevenage Borough Local Plan \(2019\)](#)
- BD3 [Stevenage Infrastructure Delivery Plan \(2017\)](#)
- BD4 [Stevenage Borough Council Mobility Strategy \(2016\)](#)
- BD5 [Stevenage Cycling Strategy \(2018\)](#)
- BD6 [Stevenage Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan \(2019\)](#)
- BD7 [Stevenage Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document \(2020\)](#)
- BD8 [Draft Stevenage Parking Strategy 2021-2033 – Living and Sustainable Streets for Stevenage](#)

APPENDICES

N/A

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Meeting: EXECUTIVE



Portfolio Area: Resources

Date: 20 January 2021

COUNCIL TAX BASE 2021/22

KEY DECISION

Author – Su Tarran Ext EHC 2075
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Clare Fletcher Ext 2933
Lead Officer – Clare Fletcher Ext 2933
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1. PURPOSE

1.1 To seek Members' approval of the Council Tax Base for 2021/22.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Stevenage Borough Council for the year 2021/22 shall be 28,227.8 equivalent "Band D" properties reduced to 27733.8 equivalent "Band D" properties after making allowances for a 98.25% collection rate.

2.2 That the 2021/22 Council Tax Base be approved, subject to any changes made to the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) for 2021/22. The Executive approved the CTS scheme at its meeting on 6 October 2020 for recommendation to Council.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended by the 2012 Act, and the accompanying secondary legislation, local authorities are required to notify preceptors and levying bodies of their Council Tax Base for the forthcoming financial year. The notification must be made between the 1 December and the 31 January.

3.2 The Council has a statutory duty to make a resolution in respect of the Council Tax Base before the precepting and levying bodies are notified.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Taxbase

4.1.1 The actual number of domestic dwellings in the borough, as shown in the Valuation Officer's list on 14 September 2020, was 37,785, compared to 37,627 as at 9 September 2019, an increase of 158 properties.

4.1.2 For each of the Council Tax bands, the tax base figure is then adjusted to take account of actual and estimated, newly constructed dwellings, exemptions, disabled reductions and discounts, (including the Council Tax Reduction Scheme discounts) to arrive at the net number of chargeable dwellings for each band.

4.1.3 This net figure is then multiplied by the relevant proportions for the particular band (e.g. Band A is 6/9 in relation to Band D) in order to convert it to the estimated number of equivalent "Band D" properties for each band.

4.1.4 The relevant proportion for each band are:

| Band | Charge ratio | Valuation (at 1/1/91 prices) |
|------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| A | 6/9 | Up to £40,000 |
| B | 7/9 | Over £40,000 and up to £52,000 |
| C | 8/9 | Over £52,000 and up to £68,000 |
| D | 9/9 | Over £68,000 and up to £88,000 |
| E | 11/9 | Over £88,000 and up to £120,000 |
| F | 13/9 | Over £120,000 and up to £160,000 |
| G | 15/9 | Over £160,000 and up to £320,000 |
| H | 18/9 | Over £320,000 |

4.1.5 These "Band D" equivalents are aggregated to give the total number of the equivalent "Band D" dwellings for the authority as a whole. For Stevenage this is 28,227.8, which is less than the actual number of dwellings. This is because the majority of dwellings in Stevenage are in Band C.

4.1.6 The Council Tax Base for 2021/22 after making allowances for a collection rate of 98.25% is 27,733.8 equivalent "Band D" properties. (The comparative figure for 2020/21 was 27,780.7).

4.1.7 The proposed 2021/22 collection rate percentage remains at 98.25%, however this may need to be reviewed if COVID impacts further arrears in 2021/22. The

Hardship Fund for those on CTS has ameliorated some of this impact, however the projected bad debt amount has been increased for the 2020/21 outturn position.

- 4.1.8 The Council Tax Base proposed is based on the current Council Tax Support Scheme liability of 8.5%. However, the caseload levels for working aged claimants has been increased for 2021/22, reflecting the projected impact of COVID on the economy in 2021/22.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 The increase in the taxbase will be included in the draft 2021/22 Council Tax Setting and General Fund Report (to the January Executive) and remains unchanged from the projection in the Financial Security Report to the December Executive. The increase in assumed property numbers and the discount assumptions including Council Tax Support is the equivalent to a total reduction of 46.9 equivalent Band D properties or a reduction of £10,115 in council tax collectable, before any council tax increase is considered. The reason for the increased council tax income is shown in the table below.

| Increased income from 2021/22 taxbase compared to 2020/21 before any council tax increase | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | 2020/21 Estimate £ | 2021/22 Estimate £ | Increase /(decrease) £ |
| Properties numbers | 7,418,220 | 7,423,194 | 4,974 |
| Council Tax Support Scheme | (721,969) | (730,689) | (8,720) |
| Changes to other discounts & Premium | (600,890) | (607,440) | (6,549) |
| Reduction for bad debt assumptions | (106,669) | (106,489) | 180 |
| Total | £5,988,692 | £5,978,576 | (£10,115) |

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 The legal implications are in the body of the report.

5.3 Risk Implications

- 5.3.1 The assumptions made are reasonable at the current time but, if the level of anticipated growth in the 2021/22 Tax Base is not realised and/or the council tax support caseload increases, an in year deficit on the Collection Fund could arise.

5.4 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.4.1 There are no direct equality and diversity implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

BD1 – Council Tax Support Scheme

APPENDICES

Appendix A - 2021/22 Council Tax Base

| Appendix A BAND | Disabled | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | TOTALS |
|--|----------|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|-------|------------------|
| AS AT CTB1 | 0 | 1641 | 6682 | 21617 | 3298 | 3176 | 924 | 432 | 15 | 37785 |
| ADD EXPECTED NEW PROPERTIES | 0 | 27.45 | 68.6 | 15.66 | 6.66 | 0 | 5.66 | 0 | 0 | 124.03 |
| EXEMPTIONS | 0 | -49 | -152 | -199 | -21 | -28 | -11 | -3 | -5 | -468 |
| DISABLED RELIEF | 0 | -2 | -8 | -91 | -11 | -27 | -5 | -8 | -2 | -154 |
| DISABLED RELIEF ADJ | 2 | 8 | 91 | 11 | 27 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 154 |
| DWELLINGS SUB-TOTAL | 2 | 1625.45 | 6681.6 | 21353.66 | 3299.66 | 3126 | 921.66 | 423 | 8 | 37441.03 |
| ASSUMED DISCOUNTS | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25% (SINGLE PERSON DISCOUNT) | 1 | 1147.82 | 4049.15 | 6272.54 | 791.60 | 549.00 | 129.79 | 57 | 0 | 12,997.89 |
| 50% (EMPTY WORK-RELATED AND ALL PERSONS DISREGARDED) | 0 | 1 | 7 | 14 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 43 |
| Council Tax Support (Reduction Scheme) | 0.49 | 366.83 | 1256.88 | 2117.83 | 197.08 | 52.06 | 12.44 | 3.59 | 0.00 | 4007.20 |
| total discounts | 1.49 | 1515.65 | 5313.03 | 8404.37 | 988.68 | 605.06 | 147.23 | 67.59 | 5.00 | 17048.09 |
| TOTAL DWELLINGS charged at 100% | 0.51 | 109.80 | 1368.57 | 12949.29 | 2310.98 | 2520.94 | 774.43 | 355.41 | 3.00 | 20392.94 |
| Long term empty premium @ 50% | 0.00 | 3 | 14 | 17 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 39.00 |
| Value of discounted properties | 0.75 | 861.37 | 3040.36 | 4711.41 | 593.70 | 413.75 | 99.84 | 46.25 | 2.50 | 9769.92 |
| DWELLINGS AFTER DISCOUNTS | 1.26 | 972.66 | 4415.93 | 17669.20 | 2904.68 | 2936.19 | 875.28 | 401.66 | 5.50 | 30182.36 |
| RATIO TO BAND D | 0.56 | 0.67 | 0.78 | 0.89 | 1.00 | 1.22 | 1.44 | 1.67 | 2.00 | |
| NO OF BAND D EQUIVALENT | 0.70 | 648.44 | 3434.61 | 15705.95 | 2904.68 | 3588.68 | 1264.29 | 669.44 | 11.00 | 28227.79 |
| | | | | | | | | TAXBASE | | 28227.8 |
| | | | | | | | | 98.25% | | 27733.8 |

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Meeting EXECUTIVE
Portfolio Area Resources/Housing
Date 20 JANUARY 2021



FINAL HRA RENT SETTING AND BUDGET REPORT

KEY DECISION

Authors Clare Fletcher | 2933
Katia Cousins | 2383
Keith Reynoldson | 2403

Lead Officers Clare Fletcher | 2933

Contact Officer Clare Fletcher | 2933

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Members on the final proposals on the HRA budgets and rent setting for 2021/22, to be considered by Council on 28 January 2021.
- 1.2 To update Members on the formula for setting rents for 2021/22.
- 1.3 To propose the HRA rents for 2021/22.
- 1.4 To propose the HRA service charges for 2021/22.
- 1.5 To update Members on the 2020/21 and 2021/22 HRA budget, incorporating the Financial Security options and fees and charges included in the December Financial Security report, together with any revised income and expenditure assumptions identified since the HRA MTFs update to the November Executive.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That HRA rent on dwellings be increased, week commencing 5 April 2021 by 1.5% which is an average increase of £1.46 for social rents, £2.38 for affordable rents and £1.80 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week

(based on a 52 week year). This has been calculated using the rent formula, CPI +1% in line with the governments rent policy as set out in paragraph 4.1.1.

- 2.2 That Council be recommended to approve the 2021/22 HRA budget as set out in Appendix A.
- 2.3 That Council be recommended to approve the 2021/22 Financial Security options as set out in Appendix B
- 2.4 That Council be recommended to approve the 2021/22 growth options as set out in Appendix C.
- 2.5 That Council be recommended to approve the 2021/22 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix D.
- 2.6 That Council be recommended to approve the 2021/22 service charges.
- 2.7 That Council be recommended to approve the minimum level of reserves for 2021/22 as shown in Appendix E to this report.
- 2.8 That the contingency sum of £250,000 within which the Executive can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2021/22 (unchanged from 2020/21).
- 2.9 That Council notes the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In November 2020 the Executive approved the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The HRA MTFS included an update on lower borrowing costs, (as a result of the government's reversal of the 1% increase in PWLB rates for housing). However the MTFS did show lower HRA balances by 2024/25 of £1.294Million, compared to the 30 year HRA Business Plan approved at the December 2019 Executive.
- 3.2 For 2021/22 rent setting there has been no change to the government rent policy issued in 2020, which allows social housing providers to increase rents by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) +1% for a five year period. Guidance released in November 2020 allows local authorities to breach this cap in circumstances of exceptional financial hardship. However, this would not currently apply to Stevenage Borough Council's HRA.
- 3.3 There are still developing policy issues in the HRA regarding the decent homes standard, environmental improvements and building safety regulations. Estimates for the potential impact of changes in these areas have been included in the budget plans, but these will need to be refined as the impact becomes clearer.
- 3.4 For the second year, the outcome of the Government's consultation on 'Use of Right to Buy (RTB) Receipts' and increased flexibilities has still not been concluded. However, local authorities have been allowed to retain their receipts between April 2020 and March 2021 (recently extended from December 2020), without penalties, due to the impact of the COVID pandemic on development schemes. The Government has also issued a further consultation, in November, asking for authorities' current position on

the use of receipts. This may lead to a further extension of the repayment timetable, but this is not known at this time. As there has not been any formal conclusion to the last Government consultation process, future policy regarding the RTB system is not known and this continues to impede the use of the receipts.

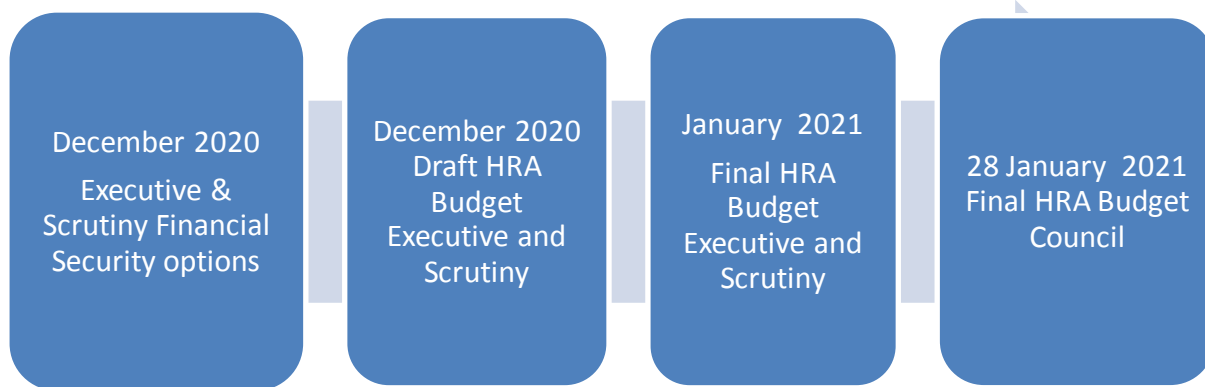
- 3.5 The HRA has been financially impacted by the COVID pandemic. Rent arrears have risen sharply and this is exacerbated by no enforcement, in line with national policy. There have also been additional costs in some parts of the service, most notably in Independent Living, due to increased COVID safety measures. The known impacts have been reflected in the budget proposals, but this is still a developing situation that will continue to be monitored carefully over the coming months.
- 3.6 The total number of HRA homes in management at 6 November 2020 is summarised in the table below. The average rents for 2021/22 are based on current housing stock, any right to buys or new schemes subsequent to this date may change the average rent per property type.

| Stock Numbers at 06/11/2020 | Social | Affordable | Sheltered | LSSO | Homeless | Total |
|-----------------------------|--------|------------|-----------|------|----------|-------|
| Number of Properties | 6,799 | 36 | 840 | 85 | 164 | 7,924 |

- 3.7 The assumptions in the HRA Draft report to the December 2020 Executive are shown in the table below.

| Financial Assumptions in the HRA Draft MTFS | 2021/22 |
|---|------------------------------|
| Rent & Service Charge Increases | CPI+1% or 1.5% |
| New Build policy | 50% Affordable 50% Social |
| Right-to-Buys | 35 |
| Financial Security options | £224,883 |
| Growth bids | £161,650 |
| Growth bids Business Plan 2019 | £950,000 |
| New Build - Number of Units | 29 |
| Repayment of Debt | 0 |
| New loans | 26,602,339 |
| Capital Deficit in the Business Plan | 0 |

3.8 The Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in the Constitution prescribe the Budget setting process, which includes a minimum consultation period of three weeks. Under Article 4 of the Constitution, the Budget also includes: the allocation of financial resources to different services and projects; proposed contingency funds; setting the rents; decisions relating to the control of the Council's borrowing requirement; the control of its capital expenditure; and the setting of virement limits. The timescale required to implement this process is outlined below.



4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Rents

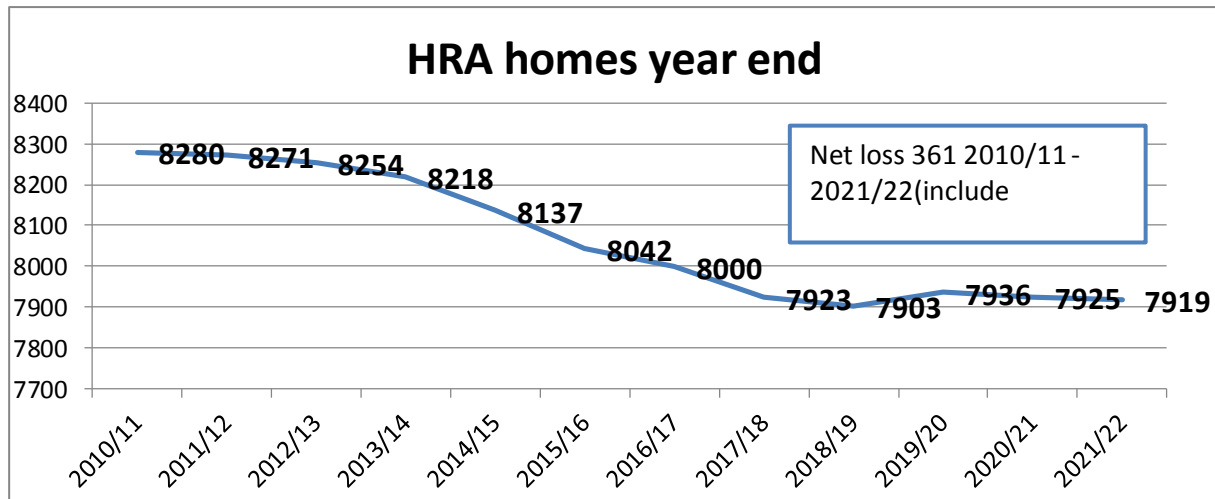
4.1.1 Rents are calculated on a formula of CPI+1% increase for 2021/22. The CPI inflation increase is based on the September index which was 0.5%, this means the increase for 2021/22 for the council's housing stock is 1.5%.

4.1.2 The proposed average rents for 2021/22 are set out in the table below, there are currently 35 affordable rented properties (ranging from four bedroom-two bedroom houses and flats).

| Average Rents 2021/22 | LSSO | Incr. % | social | Incr. % | Affordable | Incr. % |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|---------|---------------|---------|----------------|---------|
| Average Rent 2020/21 | £120.07 | | £97.58 | | £159.08 | |
| Add rent impact 2021/22 | £1.80 | 1.50% | £1.46 | 1.50% | £2.38 | 1.50% |
| Total 52 week Rent 2021/22 | £121.87 | | £99.04 | | £161.46 | |

4.1.3 The net rental income increase for 2021/22 is estimated to be £609,570, which includes the impacts of estimated right to buys, estimated new properties and properties taken out of management (awaiting redevelopment). This is unchanged from the draft budget to the December 2020 Executive.

4.1.4 The total number of properties available is estimated to have reduced by 361 homes between 2010/11 and 2021/22, (based on net impact of RTB's, new homes, homes awaiting development). The forecast numbers for 2021/22 reflect the latest development timetables for schemes like Kenilworth and Symonds Green and an expected lower level of open market purchases, while they are being built.



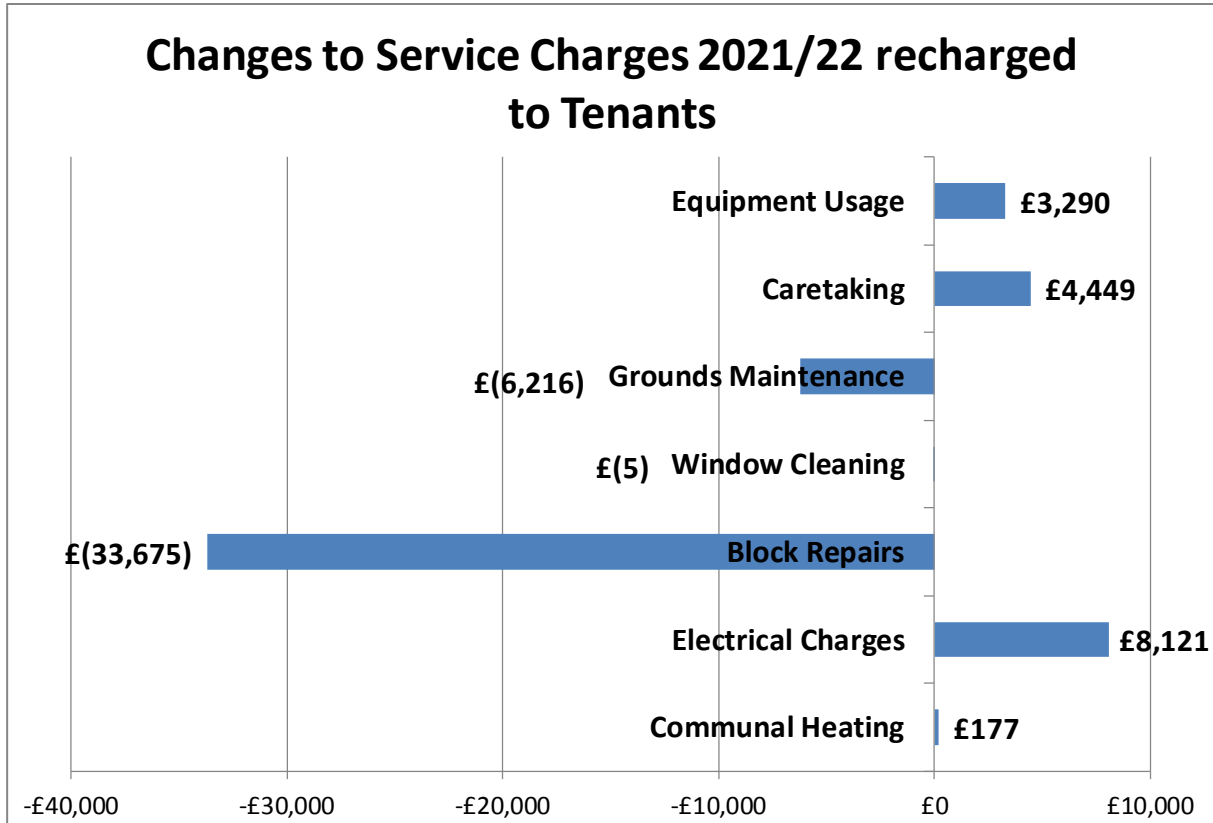
4.2 Service Charges

4.2.1 Service charges are calculated for each block individually for the 2,956 properties, (2020/21, 2,940) or 37% of current SBC tenanted properties. A review of service charges has not been concluded in time for 2021/22 rent and service charge setting and requires tenant and Member consultation. The type of service charges currently provided, (eligible for housing benefit) are shown below.

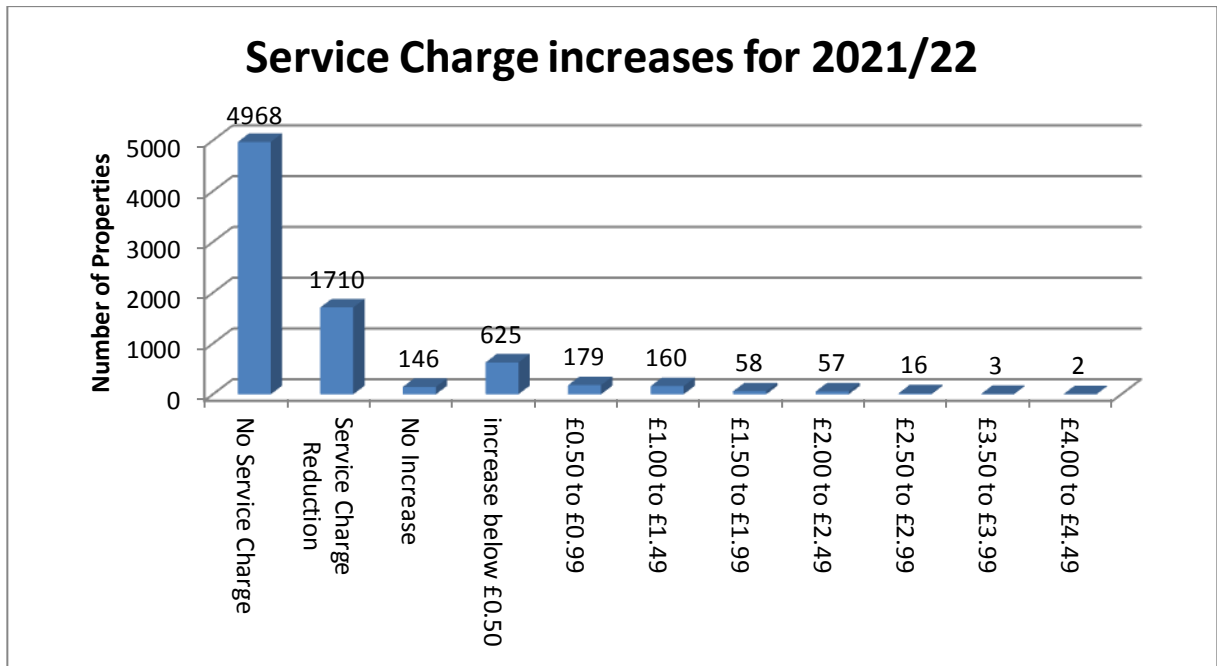
| Service Charges: |
|--|
| Caretaking |
| Grounds maintenance |
| Window cleaning |
| Block repairs (including pest control) |
| Electrical charges |
| Communal heating |

4.2.2 Service charges are not subject to the rental increase of 1.5%, but are based on cost recovery. For 2021/22, service charge costs will increase with inflationary pressures and changes in usage. The chart below identifies the

changes between 2020/21 and 2021/22 for service charges. The estimates are based on the projected budgeted costs for 2021/22, with the exception of block repairs, which is 'smoothed' over a five year period to eliminate individual in year spikes in repairs spend. This is unchanged from the draft budget to the December 2020 Executive.



4.2.3 The spread of service charge increases for all tenants in 2021/22 is shown in the chart below. The impact of the changes in service charges, means 1,710 or 58% of homes (who get a service charge) will receive a service charge reduction, even though service charges have fluctuated between individual services as shown above. There are only two properties with a service charge increase above £4.00.

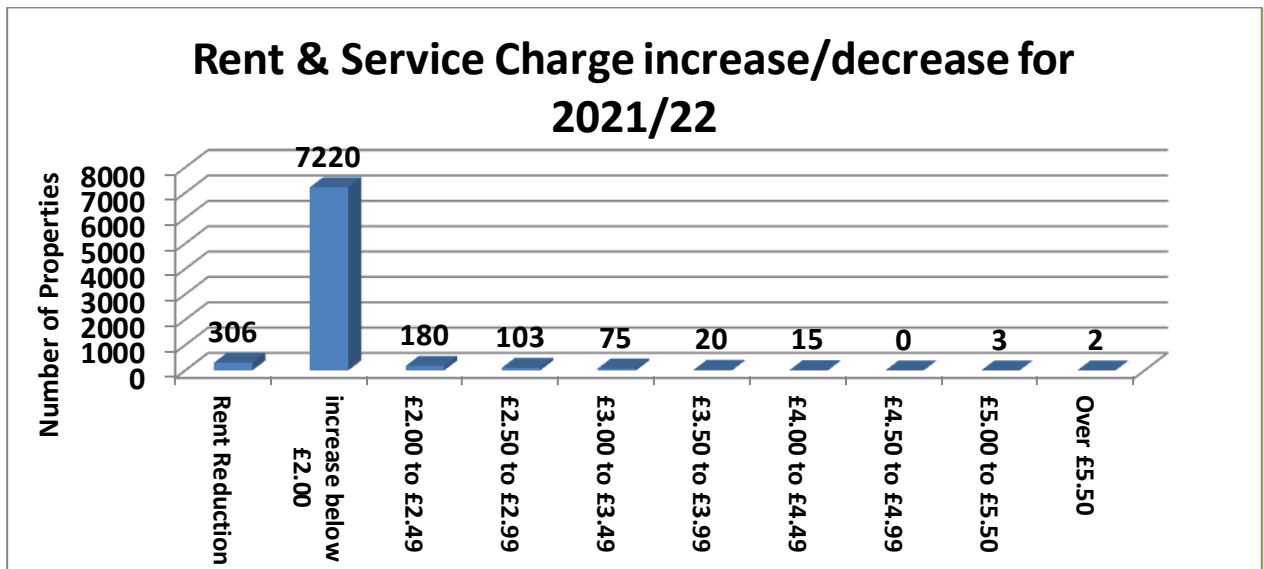


4.3 Rents and Service Charges

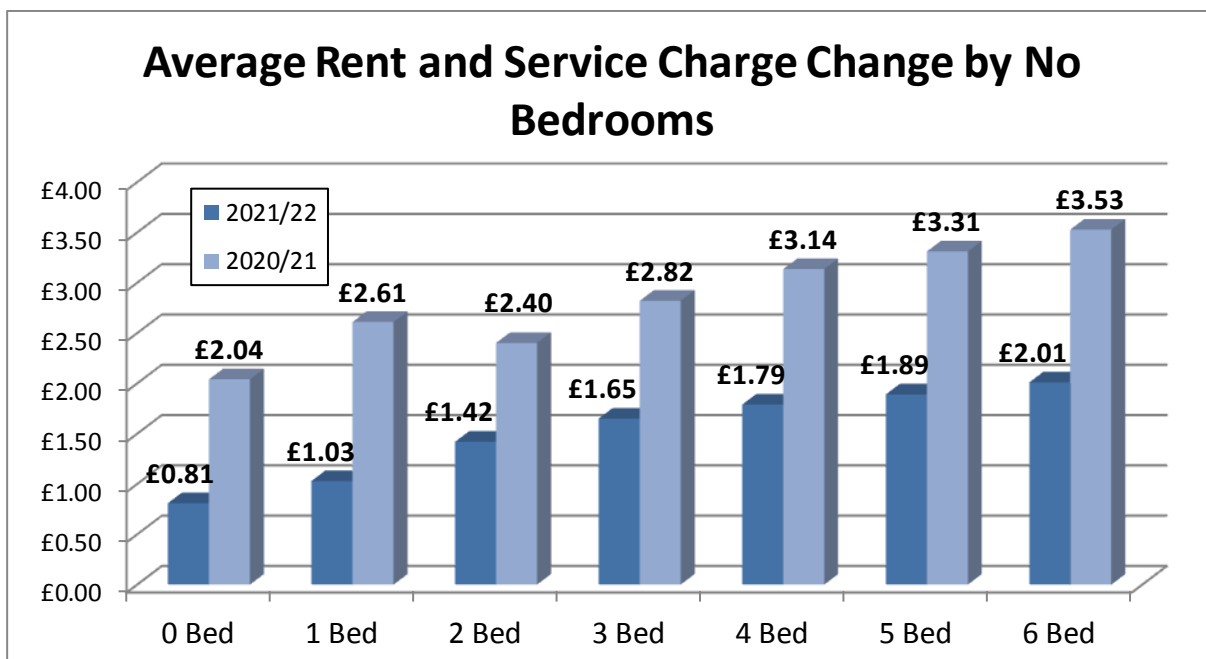
4.3.1 The impact of the 2021/22 rent increase and service charges is

- 306 homes or 4% receive a rent and service charge reduction;
- 7,578 homes or 96% of households will receive a weekly rent and service charge increase of less than £3.50 (based on 52 weeks).
- There are only 5 properties with a weekly rent and service charge increase of more than £5.00.

4.3.2 The spread of the 2021/22 rent and service charge changes are summarised in the chart below.



4.3.3 The average rent and service charge increase/decrease by bedroom size has also been calculated and summarised in the chart below.



4.3.4 The comparison between HRA property rents per week and private sector rents per week, for one to four bedroom properties, is shown in the table below. A three bedroom private sector rental property costs an additional 133%, (2020/21,137%) more per week than a SBC council home and 32% more than the affordable let properties,(2020/21 34%).

| | SBC Social Rent | SBC Affordable Rent | Median Private Rent | Local Housing Allowance 2020/21 | Median % v SBC Social | Median % v SBC Affordable |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Bed Property | £84.99 | £132.45 | £168.89 | £155.34 | 99% | 28% |
| 2 Bed Property | £99.23 | £168.55 | £221.30 | £195.62 | 123% | 31% |
| 3 Bed Property | £109.96 | £194.37 | £256.24 | £241.64 | 133% | 32% |
| 4 Bed Property | £121.40 | £233.04 | £314.48 | £299.18 | 159% | 35% |

Private rent Data from ONS as at March 2020 updated by ONS rental inflation for East of England to September 2020. Please note the SBC rents are 2021/22 prices and the private rents 2020/21 prices.

4.3.5 **The Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** shown in the table above is the maximum amount of housing benefit payable by property size for private rented properties.

4.4 Borrowing

4.4.1 Last year the HRA Business Plan was recalculated to take advantage of the lifting of the HRA debt cap that had restricted HRA borrowing to £217Million. The HRA MTFS reported that loan rates are estimated at 1.47% and 1.56% respectively. New loans totalling £23.8Million and £26.6Million are expected to be taken in the current and next financial years. However, the decision when

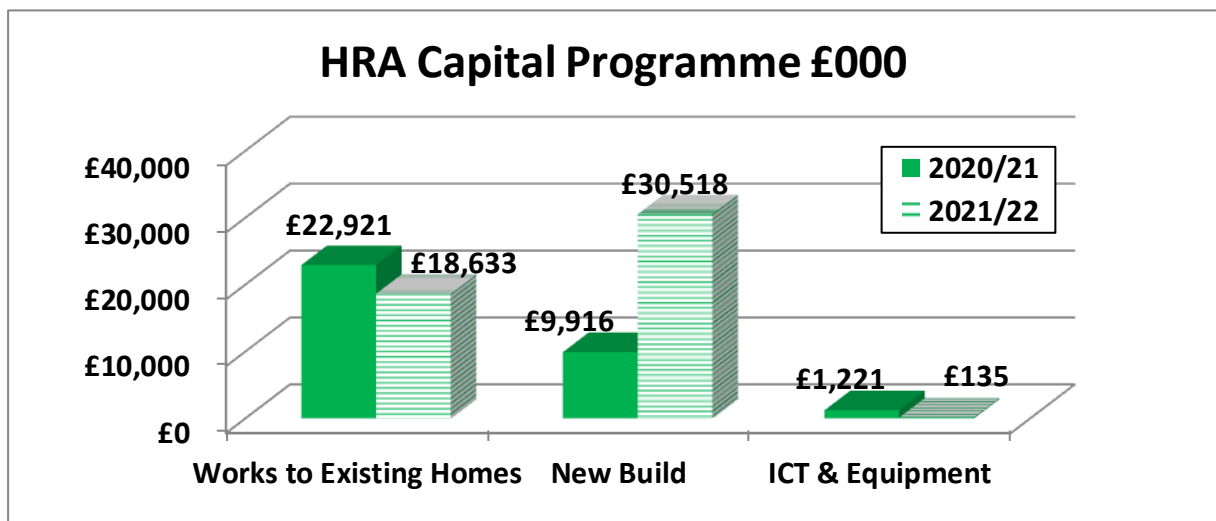
to take the new borrowing will be reviewed, weighing up the cost of carry and the prevailing PWLB rates. The interest payable in 2020/21 and 2021/22 is estimated to be £7,328,770 and £7,800,270 respectively. This is unchanged from the draft budget to the December 2020 Executive.

4.4.2 The 2019 HRA Business Plan (to the December 2019 Executive) set out an ambitious programme of investment in current and new housing stock, taking advantage of the new financial freedoms offered by the debt cap removal. These plans were not significantly changed in the HRA MTFS report to November 2020 Executive.

4.5 Contributions to Capital Expenditure

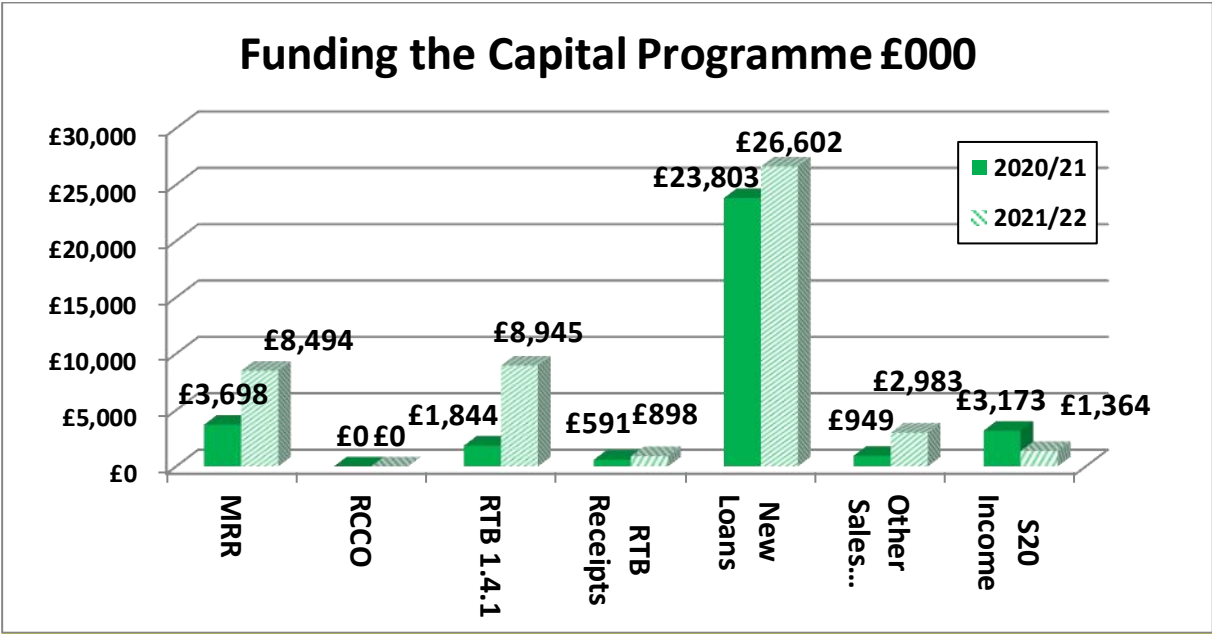
4.5.1 There is no requirement for a revenue contribution to capital (RCCO) as result of the borrowing set out in section 4.4 above.

4.5.2 The 2021/22 budgeted depreciation allowance required by legislation to be transferred to the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR) to fund the capital programme is £11,484,000. This has been supplemented by a revenue contribution to capital of £1,359,260 in order to support the planned works and these combined figures give an increase of £356,840 on the 2020/21 amount. A summary of the 2020/21-2021/22 capital programme is shown in the chart below.



4.5.3 The increase in the value of the 2021/22 capital programme compared to the current 2020/21 programme is mainly due to rescheduling of new build schemes and the impact of the Kenilworth scheme expenditure on the programme. Expenditure on the existing stock is expected to be lower and this is mainly due to the scheduling of the Major Repairs Contract (MRC) works. The draft capital strategy recommends an increase in HRA expenditure on IT and Digital.

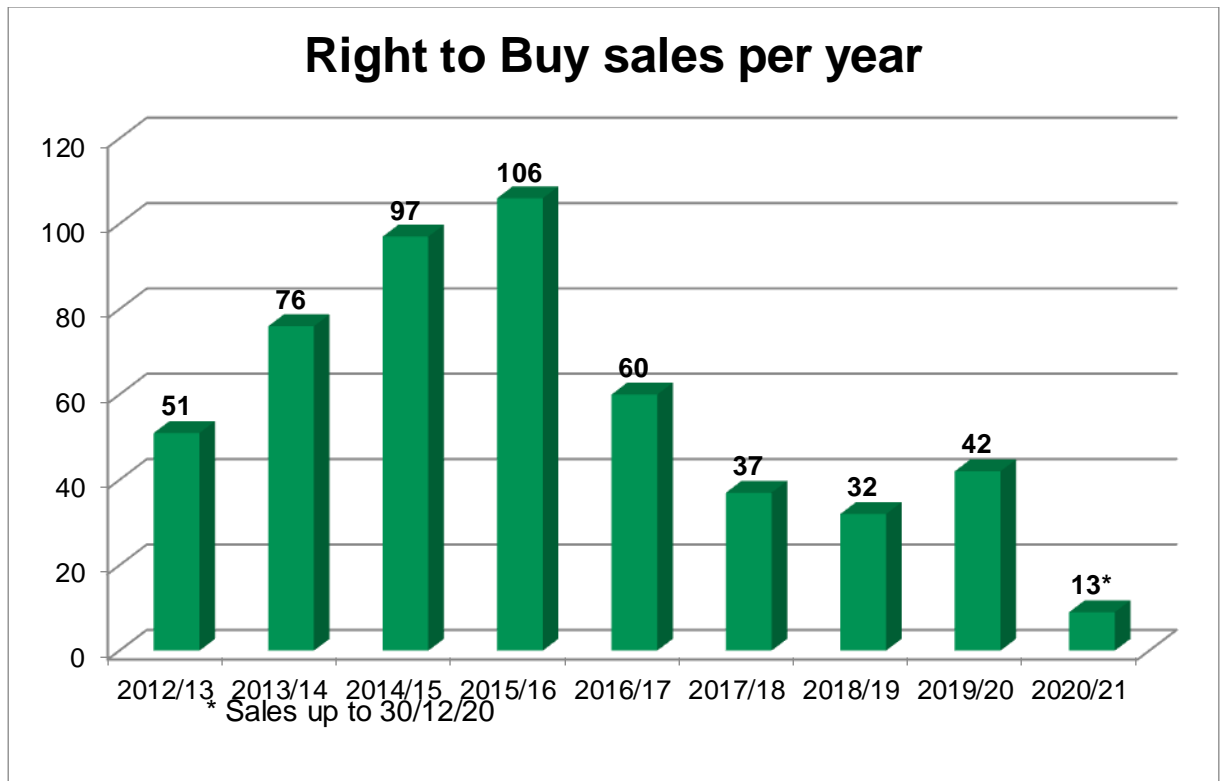
- 4.5.4 The recently published Housing White paper is likely to have an impact on both capital and revenue budgets and once the assessment of any additional costs have been made, further growth bids may be required and the impact included in the refresh of the HRA Business Plan next financial year.
- 4.5.5 The capital programme funding for 2020/21 and the draft HRA capital programme 2021/22 is summarised in the chart below. This is unchanged from the draft budget to the December Executive.



4.6 Use of One for One Receipts

- 4.6.1 The Council continues to retain the majority of the capital receipts arising from the sale of RTB properties, in line with the retention agreement signed with the Government. Under this agreement the receipts must be used within three years to fund a maximum of 30% of spend on replacement properties, or be paid to the Government with a high interest penalty. While the new build programme, identified in the Business Plan, is large enough to make full use of the receipts, there has often been difficulties in matching the timing of expenditure to when the receipts must be used.
- 4.6.2 The Government has recognised the potential difficulties in meeting construction timetables during the current pandemic and have allowed local authorities to retain their receipts between April 2020 and March 2021 (recently extended from December 2020), without penalties. Latest forecasts show that with the use of this extension Stevenage Borough Council will not need to pay receipts to the Government for the current financial year. However this position needs to be continually monitored in case of any slippage in the timing of schemes. The government asked for further views on 1.4.1 receipts which were submitted by officers at the end of November.
- 4.6.3 In future years the issue of spending the receipts within the time limit should reduce, as shown in the graph below. This is partly due to a fall in the levels of

RTB sales, leading to a lower level of receipts that need to be spent. Combined with the Kenilworth scheme that will ensure the use of receipts within the three year time limit. In 2021/22 the Council will need to spend 1.4.1 receipts of £2.9Million, derived from sales in 2018/19. Current projections show that these should be fully used by the second quarter of next year and that no receipts will need to be paid to Government.



13 right to buy sales have occurred in 20/21, an increase of four since the draft HRA budget report which showed nine sales up until the 6th November 2020. It is anticipated that a further 14 sales will be made in the final quarter of 20/21.

4.6.4 At this time the risk of surrendering receipts to the Government has further reduced if spend happens as profiled. However, the issues raised on the current time limit in the agreement will continue to be challenged, in order to have a more flexible system that allows these resources to be invested locally. Any delays, or slippage, in the development programme could breach the three year rule and lead to a loss of receipts and interest penalties, despite having schemes that need the funds. For this reason this area is reviewed each quarter in order to minimise the potential cost to the HRA.

4.7 Draft Budget Proposals

4.7.1 The HRA budget is estimated to be a net income of £2,791,960 which is a reduction of £204,020 from the reported position within the draft HRA budget report to December 2020 Executive. The reasons for the changes are summarised in the table below.

| Summary of 2021/22 | | |
|--|-----------|---------------------|
| Draft HRA 2021/22 budget | | (£2,923,980) |
| Increases in Income/Reductions in Expenditure: | | |
| Reduction in budgeted salary costs | (£36,690) | |
| New Savings - Graduate Scheme HRA share | (£16,660) | (£53,350) |
| | | |
| Increases in Expenditure: | | |
| Increase in leaseholder Insurance | £20,970 | |
| Additional recharges from GF (including digital ICT) | £213,450 | |
| Other Minor Changes | £22,950 | £257,370 |
| | | |
| Total Changes: | | £204,020 |
| Final HRA 2021/22 budget | | (£2,719,960) |

4.7.2 The 2020/21 budget summarised below includes changes not previously reported in the December 2020 report.

| Summary of 2020/21 budget movements | | |
|---|--|---------------------|
| Working Budget 2020/21 | | (£3,309,210) |
| Increase in external audit fees (HRA share) | | £23,340 |
| Other budgets | | £40,200 |
| Total Changes | | £63,540 |
| Revised Working Budget | | (£3,245,670) |

4.7.3 The 2020/21 HRA projected year-end net income is estimated to be £63,540 lower than included in the November MTFs Report and includes the HRA share of external audit costs, with the remainder a number of budget changes identified as part of the budget setting process.

4.7.4 All HRA balances in excess of the minimum balances held for assessed risks in year, are required to fund the HRA 30 year capital programme.

| HRA Balances: | 2020/21 £ | 2021/22 £ |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| HRA Balance 1 April | (19,819,411) | (23,065,081) |
| Use of balances in Year | (3,245,670) | (2,719,960) |
| HRA Balance 31 March | (23,065,081) | (25,785,041) |
| Minimum Balances | (2,985,000) | (2,985,000) |
| Debt Repayments | (20,080,081) | (22,800,041) |

4.8 Comments from Overview and Scrutiny

4.8.1 The Overview and Scrutiny committee considered the draft HRA rent, service charge proposals and budget at their meeting of the 15th December 2020. The CFO (Chief Finance Officer) introduced the report and the Committee were advised that the draft HRA budget included the growth set out in the HRA Business Plan and that the average rent increase for Council homes was 1.5%, based on a CPI + 1% rise. The paper was noted with no questions raised.

4.9 Consultation

4.9.1 The Council remains committed to working in partnership with council tenants and leaseholders to shape, strengthen and improve council housing services and sets out a range of options to enable housing customers to be involved.

4.9.2 The Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) acts as an advisory body to the Executive for council housing-related matters, including participation in the HRA budget-setting process and the development of the HRA Business Plan. HMAB currently includes one leaseholder and five tenant representatives in addition to Member and officer representation.

4.9.3 The HMAB has not met in the last few months but have received the draft HRA budget report and a slide presentation highlighting the key information and any comments will be fed back to the Executive prior to the final budget report being recommended to the Council.

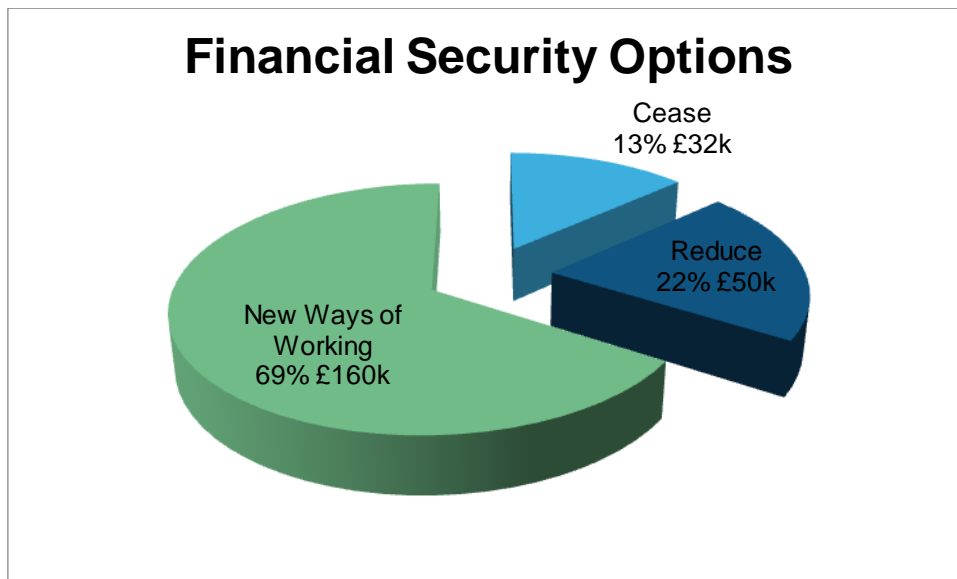
4.9.4 Targeted consultation will be carried out with staff, customers and stakeholders directly affected by the financial security options agreed by the Executive in November 2020. All tenants will be notified of changes to their rent and service charges in February/March 2021.

4.9.5 The STAR survey was undertaken in early 2018 and we will seek to understand the priorities when this is updated in 2021.

4.10 The 2021/22 Financial Security Options process for the General Fund and HRA

4.10.1 The Leader of the Council recommended a departure to the normal Financial Security process for the 2020/21 budget, which normally has any options channelled through the cross party Leaders Financial Security Group (LFSG). This was primarily because of the potential level of savings required as exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and the need for Portfolio holders and the Executive as a whole to make some service prioritisation decisions.

4.10.2 The Financial Security options totalling £241,546 are shown in the chart below, with further detail provided in Appendix B:



- The options consider changes implemented as part of the different way staff now work due to the move from office to remote working.
- The services that are severely impacted by COVID.
- The functions that the Council were funding but were the responsibility of other public bodies.
- Considering the level of budget pressures which increased the level of savings particularly for the General Fund.

4.10.3 The LSFG did reconvene to consider fee increases on 11 November 2020 and made some recommended changes to the HRA fees and charges. Fees and Charges options total £73,950 and are shown in Appendix D.

4.11 Growth included in the HRA

4.11.1 The growth and service pressure totalling £161,650 included in the 2021/22 HRA budget is summarised in the chart below and detailed in appendix C.



**HRA share of General Fund expenditure*

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.1.1 Financial implications are included in the body of the report

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 Legal implications are included in the body of the report

5.3 Staffing Implications

5.3.1 The unions have been consulted on the options approved at the November Executive. Human Resources staff are co-ordinating centrally the implementation of any staff related savings.

5.4 Risk Implications

5.4.1 Due to frequent Government policy changes, there are significant risks in setting the HRA budget. Historically the ring fenced account has relied almost solely on rent income to finance both revenue and capital works. Many changes in policy, including the loss of £225Million from the Business Plan from four years of rent reductions (2016/17-2019/20 estimated over a 30 year period), have made medium to long term planning difficult. These risks increase with the removal of the debt cap and further borrowing, as the Council is making long term financing decisions, on capital investment, based on income streams set by the current policy. However the Council has set aside a HRA interest equalisation reserve of £5.7Million to reduce the impact on borrowing costs on the HRA and the increased borrowing was affordable based on the current assumptions.

- 5.4.2 Currently one of the biggest risks to the account is a large increase in arrears. Over 2019/20 weekly rent arrears increased from £300K to £800K and it is believed that this was in part due to increasing numbers of tenants switching from housing benefits to Universal Credit. However, from April 2020 arrears continued to rise and now stand at just under £1.2Million. This was due to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and the measures put in place by the Government, which included a suspension of evictions. To mitigate this position increased resources are being employed to help recover rent owed and the provision for bad debt has been increased to recognise that not all of the outstanding debt will be recovered.
- 5.4.3 There is a potential adverse financial impact on the HRA as a result of high inflationary pressures. Rent increases are based on the September CPI figure, which was below normal levels at 0.5% this year. If inflation rises above that assumed in the budget generally, or spikes as a result of BREXIT, reductions in spend may need to be made or some of the growth recommended in the MTFS update removed.
- 5.4.4 The full operational implications of regulatory changes after the Grenfell tragedy are still being implemented. Provision was made in the last Business Plan to allow for an additional £500K in the budget. However, as policy and best practice across the sector is developed this may need to be reviewed and could lead to an increase budget pressures on the HRA.
- 5.4.5 With the increased level of borrowing in the HRA, after the removal of the debt cap, there is a greater risk of interest rates being higher than projected and leading to a reduction in the amount of expenditure for both revenue and capital. There is also a risk that PWLB rate differential between gilts and borrowing rates will be increased as happened in 2019/20. To mitigate this, an interest rate reserve of £5.7Million has been set up to offset any future variances from expected rates.
- 5.4.6 The HRA has an annual Financial Security target to achieve, which for 2021/22 onwards is £100,000 per year.

5.5 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.5.1 In carrying out or changing its functions (including those relating to the provision of services and the employment of staff) the Council must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and in particular section 149 which is the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Act replaced three previous equality legislations – the Race Relations Act (section 71), the Sex Discrimination Act (section 76A) and the Disability Discrimination Act (section 49A). The Council has a statutory obligation to comply with the requirements of the Act, demonstrating that as part of the decision-making process, due regard has been given to the needs described in the legislation. These duties are non-delegable and must be considered by Council when setting the budget in January 2021.
- 5.5.2 To inform the decisions about the Budget 2021/22 officers have undertaken Brief Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) for service-related budget savings proposals. Where there is a potentially negative impact, officers have identified further action needed to inform a final decision and to mitigate the impact where this is possible. These EqIA were included in the November

Report and will be appended to the final HRA Budget report together with an EQIA for the rent and service charges increase for the January Executive.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

BD1 Housing Revenue Account MTFS November 2020 Executive

BD2 Draft HRA and Budget Setting Report December 2020 Executive

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Final HRA Summary

Appendix B – Financial Security Options

Appendix C – Growth and Budget Pressures

Appendix D – Fees and Charges

Appendix E – Risk Assessment of Balances

Appendix F – EQIA for HRA Services

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| APPENDIX A | HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT SUMMARY | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Actual 2019/20 £ | Original Budget 2020/21 £ | Working Budget 2020/21 £ | Original Budget 2021/22 £ |
| Summary of Expenditure | | | | |
| Supervision and Management | 10,002,557 | 9,177,690 | 9,422,701 | 9,404,810 |
| Special Services | 4,321,555 | 4,747,230 | 4,928,909 | 5,090,240 |
| Rent, Rates, Taxes and Other Charges | 637,164 | 465,290 | 465,710 | 539,430 |
| Repairs and Maintenance ⁽¹⁾ | 5,361,410 | 7,501,970 | 7,395,690 | 7,594,610 |
| Corporate and Democratic Costs | 774,300 | 554,360 | 937,640 | 967,050 |
| Contribution to the Bad Debt Provision | 306,264 | 217,620 | 322,970 | 224,220 |
| Total Expenditure | 21,403,251 | 22,664,160 | 23,473,620 | 23,820,360 |
| Summary of Income | | | | |
| Rental Income: | | | | |
| Dwelling Rents | (39,011,816) | (40,281,360) | (40,211,950) | (40,891,590) |
| Non Dwelling Rents | (82,958) | (90,430) | (88,120) | (91,640) |
| | (39,094,774) | (40,371,790) | (40,300,070) | (40,983,230) |
| Charges for Services & Facilities - Tenants | (2,092,042) | (2,237,800) | (2,250,820) | (2,282,150) |
| Leaseholder Service Charges | (844,547) | (967,280) | (894,910) | (975,920) |
| Contributions Towards Expenditure | (747,005) | (344,580) | (399,060) | (346,400) |
| Reimbursement of Costs | (360,698) | (345,540) | (301,380) | (345,540) |
| Recharge Income (GF & Capital) | (1,751,255) | (1,789,600) | (1,932,440) | (2,029,100) |
| Total Income | (44,890,321) | (46,056,590) | (46,078,680) | (46,962,340) |
| Depreciation | 11,351,592 | 12,486,420 | 12,327,160 | 11,484,000 |
| Impairment/Loss on Revaluation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Interest Payable | 6,866,958 | 7,837,130 | 7,328,770 | 7,800,270 |
| Interest Receivable | (397,855) | (347,750) | (296,540) | (221,510) |
| Net (Surplus)/Deficit For Year | (5,666,376) | (3,416,630) | (3,245,670) | (4,079,220) |
| Appropriations: | | | | |
| Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,359,260 |
| Self Financing Contribution To Provision | 1,810,558 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pension Reversal | (374,384) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Transfer to Interest Rate Fluctuation Reserve | 5,712,851 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Housing Revenue Account Balance | | | | |
| Net Expenditure/(Income) for Year | 1,482,648 | (3,416,630) | (3,245,670) | (2,719,960) |
| Balance B/Fwd 1 April | (21,302,059) | (19,819,411) | (19,819,411) | (23,065,081) |
| HRA Balance C/Fwd 31 March | (19,819,411) | (23,236,041) | (23,065,081) | (25,785,041) |
| SERVICE DETAILS: | | | | |
| In 2012/13 the HRA became a self financing account and the housing subsidy system ceased. This change allows all future revenues to be available to be spent locally with the exception of the pooled element of Right to Buy sales. | | | | |
| ⁽¹⁾ Repairs and maintenance costs only. Management costs are included in the Supervision and Management line. | | | | |

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FINANCIAL SECURITY OPTIONS 2021/22

| Fund | Projected 2021/22 | Projected 2022/23 |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| General Fund | £455,392 | £545,747 |
| HRA | £241,546 | £296,802 |
| Total | £696,938 | £842,549 |

| Ref No | Portfolio holder | Name of Service | Description of Savings Proposal | Implementati on costs (any redundancy/ capital) | If staff affected indicate no. of staff | Net Direct costs of service | Recharges | Total Cost | Ongoing (Y/N) or No of further years available | Impact of Saving Proposal on Public/ Customers/ Staff/ Members/Partnerships etc. (include any impact on key corporate programmes/performance indicator measures) | Potential Timing (put the date you estimate it will be implemented, consider any consultation required) | £ General Fund Year 1 | £ HRA Year 1 |
|--------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|--|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|
|--------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|--|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|

2021/22 Budget Options

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|---|---|----------|---|------------|----------|------------|-----------------|--|---|--------|---------|
| FS14 | Leader of the Council | Fairtrade | Cease payment | | | £1,500 | £0 | £1,500 | Y | The Council pays a subscription which costs £1,500 per year. | 1 April 2021 | 1,005 | 495 |
| FS15 | Leader of the Council | CE, Directors & Support | Reduce support to Directors and CE by reducing Executive support by 0.5FTE | £0 | 1 | £586,290 | £112,230 | £698,520 | Y | Reduce the Executive support to 2.5FTE from 3.5FTE | 1 April 2021 | 14,742 | 6,318 |
| FS16 | Leader of the Council | Members Expenses | Cease provision of refreshments | | | £526,060 | £54,370 | £580,430 | Y | Delete refreshment budgets due to new ways of working | 1 April 2021 | 2,100 | 1,400 |
| FS17 | Leader of the Council | Democratic Services | Delete 18.5 hour post in Member services due to retirement | £0 | 1 | £363,230 | £19,080 | £382,310 | Y | The post holder is retiring and the work will be absorbed within the existing team | 1 April 2021 | 8,940 | 5,960 |
| FS46 | Leader of the Council | Constitutional Services - Management Restructure | Streamlining management arrangements within Constitutional Services upon the retirement of the current Constitutional Services Manager post holder. | £0 | 3 | | | | Y | The current post holder for the position of Constitutional Services Manager is due to retire in October 2021. It is envisaged that current members of the Constitutional Services team would be appointed into the newly created roles and that there would be no redundancies. Option is to delete the Constitutional Services Manager (Grade 10) and Elections and Land Charges Manager (Grade 9) posts. Create a new Constitutional and Electoral Services Manager (Grade 12) role. Involves converting a Constitutional Services Officer(Grade 6) to a Senior Constitutional Services Officer (Grade 8) and the creation of a new Electoral Services Officer Post (Grade 4 and 0.5fte) | Nov 2021 | 6,624 | 4,416 |
| FS19 | Leader of the Council | Policy | Combine Residents and Star survey | | | £38,650 | £0 | £38,650 | N-every 3 years | Commission both surveys together and explore the potential to combine and rationalise. This may limit statistical reliability due to sample size, but could also supplement this with community engagement work with those who do not traditionally participate in surveys. i.e. children and young people | 1 April 2021 | 8,500 | 8,500 |
| FS20 | Leader of the Council | Member Training | Reduce Member training by 50% | | | £8,500 | £0 | £8,500 | Y | Training will be limited to LGA related training and smaller training offer to Members | 1 April 2021 | 2,550 | 1,700 |
| FS47 | Leader of the Council | Member General Expenses | Removal of budget | | | £500 | £0 | £500 | Y | No longer needed as have an alternative Miscellaneous Budget | 1 April 2021 | 300 | 200 |
| FS48 | Leader of the Council | Member Travel Expenses | Reduction in travel expenses budget due to new ways of working e.g. remote meetings | | | £12,600 | £0 | £12,600 | Y | Reduction in Member Travel Expenses budget. | 1 April 2021 | 1,200 | 800 |
| FS18 | Leader of the Council | Communications | Cease Pride award dinner function | | | £15,000 | £0 | £15,000 | Y | Cease holding the evening function but still celebrate with awards. | 1 April 2021 | 12,300 | 2,700 |
| FS23 | Neighbourhood & Co-operative working | CSC and Customer Focus Re design and efficiencies, supported by implementation of new digital technology resulting in channel shift and automation. | Streamline Customer Focus and Customer Services into one team including: A reduction of 1 FTE Grade 9 post from the combining the Customer Focus and Customer Services Manager roles in a single post. A reduction of 1FTE Manager/Team Leader (currently 5 in total, assumed Grade 5). A reduction of 4FTE Customer Service Advisors at Grade2/3 A reduction of 1 Customer Insight Adviser at Grade 3. | £110,000 | 2 | £1,102,380 | £566,770 | £1,669,150 | Y | Customers - Functionality enabled by the Digital Platform project in 2020/21 will enable some shift of contact away from more resource intensive telephony and face to face channels which will reduce the adviser levels needed in order to maintain current performance for customers. Aligning the customer focus team with customer services will ensure continuous improvement can be embedded in service delivery. Other Business Units - The reduction in the Customer Insight adviser (complaints) would be mitigated by implementing a new digital case work solution using Firmstep (which is less resource intensive than emails) and better early management of cases by customer services to reduce the escalation to formal complaints. Digital case management for complaints will make it easier to track and manage cases. However, there may be some temporary additional pressure on service areas in order to support complaints handling while the tools are embedded, and to deal with complex cases. | 1 June 2021 | 69,668 | 100,401 |
| FS26 | Neighbourhood & Co-operative working | Print Room | Remove the Document Centre Officer (Grade 3) post in ICT. | £60,000 | 1 | £37,010 | £65,010 | £102,020 | Y | This requires services to find alternative solutions for printing or to reduce the need for bulk printing. The key users are Housing Investment and members (committee papers). Members would need to print their own committee papers or to use Modern Gov to view papers for meetings. | 1 June 2021 | 12,722 | 8,841 |
| FS27 | Neighbourhood & Co-operative working | Printing and photocopiers | Remove 4 MFD's from Daneshill & reduce Click usage to 50% of 19/20's volume | | | | | £0 | Y | Reduce the amount of printing in 2019/20 there were 594,000 prints in qtr. 1 , this had reduced to 200,000 in qrt1 2020/21, increasing to 270,000 in qtr. 2 2020/21. If printing could be reduced by 50% this would give the saving shown | 1 April 2021 | 9,157 | 6,363 |
| FS28 | Neighbourhood & Co-operative working | Reduce Postage costs | Reduce posted items through email and new ways of communicating during the pandemic | | | £94,650 | £0 | £94,650 | Y | Reduce the amount of postage but this requires staff to continue with new ways of working and contacting residents. | Immediate- savings taken as one off in year | 21,730 | 23,270 |
| FS30 | Resources | Facilities Management | Combine FM and compliance Manager role in one post and delete the FM manager and Compliance Manager, delete vacant FM roles , create data manager post to manage Assets and the insourced compliance contract. | £0 | 0 | £419,430 | £176,090 | £595,520 | Y | Combining compliance and insourcing compliance is projected to reduce costs further. However these cannot be released until the backlog of repairs is completed and a fuller assessment made. | Immediate | 19,665 | 6,555 |

FINANCIAL SECURITY OPTIONS 2021/22

| Fund | Projected 2021/22 | Projected 2022/23 |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| General Fund | £455,392 | £545,747 |
| HRA | £241,546 | £296,802 |
| Total | £696,938 | £842,549 |

| Ref No | Portfolio holder | Name of Service | Description of Savings Proposal | Implementati on costs (any redundancy/ capital) | If staff affected indicate no. of staff | Net Direct costs of service | Recharges | Total Cost | Ongoing (Y/N) or No of further years available | Impact of Saving Proposal on Public/ Customers/ Staff/ Members/Partnerships etc. (include any impact on key corporate programmes/performance indicator measures) . | Potential Timing (put the date you estimate it will be implemented, consider any consultation required) | £ General Fund Year 1 | £ HRA Year 1 |
|--------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|--|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|
|--------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|--|--|---|-----------------------|--------------|

2021/22 Budget Options

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|---|--|------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| FS32 | Resources | Audit, Anti Fraud & Corp Banking Charges | Reduce the number of Audit days from Shared Anti Fraud Service (SIAS) by 10%. | | | £114,400 | £3,030 | £117,430 | Y | The number of Audit days was reduced a number of years ago, SIAS will be factoring this into their budgets next year. This could lead to a waiting list for audits. There are currently 350 days and this would reduce the programme by 35 days. Potentially reducing operational audits but sufficient days for a council of SBC size. | 1 April 2021 | 9,209 | 2,231 |
| FS33 | Resources | | Reapportion cost between HRA & GF based on case load, the number of cases has increased for housing services | | | £104,010 | £3,500 | £107,510 | Y | This increases the cost to the HRA as the caseload data shows that a greater proportion of the service is used by the HRA (Stats:156 referrals of which 64 housing 2019/20 & 7 properties recovered and 1 RTB cancelled) | 1 April 2021 | 22,400 | -22,400 |
| FS35 | Resources | Financial Services | Delete one Graduate Post and one apprentice post | | posts vacant | £191,500 | £25,510 | £217,010 | Y | Reduce by one apprentices and one trainee not filled, this will reduce ability to react to organisation requests and will not allow for any succession planning. Significant proportion of the staff are 50+ and this reduces succession planning and does not alleviate current high work demands which was the intention when the structure was approved. | 1 April 2021 | 67,114 | 11,096 |
| FS36 | Resources | Financial Services- procurement | Increase provision to EHDC and Hertsmere Borough Council (2.59FTE's , production of CSO's, training, Procurement Strategy, advice which ahs avoided legal challenges). | | | £138,390 | £76,650 | £215,040 | Y | The service has been shared with Hertsmere and East Herts and a total of circa £82K of costs reduced by sharing the equivalent of 0.91FTE out of 2.59FTE. The saving shown is the additional savings of the SLA's above that originally estimated. | 1 April 2021 | 21,296 | 25,273 |
| FS37 | Resources | Financial Services-paralegal (There are 2 paralegals posts or 1.91FTE dealing with RTB's, debt recovery, deeds) | Reduce hours in paralegal team, there are 2 posts or 1.67FTE. This would reduce the hours per week by 12 hours | | vacant post | £87,350 | £20,510 | £107,860 | Y | The would take out the 0.27 FTE out of the service and would mean that debt recovery would be slowed as would RTB application process if caseload increases. This would reduce the capacity to deal with commercial arrears which are likely to increase due to COVID and the delay to evictions until the end of December 2020 as a result of non-payment. | Immediate | 9,816 | 5,004 |
| FS42 | Resources | Human Resources and Training | Delete job advertising budgets- fund any costs from the vacancy of the post | £0 | 0 | £748,330 | £212,790 | £961,120 | Y | There is a risk the transitional vacancy factor may not be achieved this will need to managed as part of the recruitment process. £45K-£50K has been traditionally spent on GF recruitment, exceeding the budget (there have been a number of senior recruitment drives) and for the HRA £6K-£26K over the last 3 years | 1 April 2021 | 19,240 | 16,760 |
| FS43 | Resources | | Reduce professional training budget | | | | | £0 | Y | Where ever possible all professional qualifications will be funded by the apprentice levy. In circumstances where professional qualification is deemed necessary for an individuals roles, SBC will now funded 50% of this through a bursary scheme and ask the individual to fund 50% themselves. | 1 April 2021 | 3,000 | 4,000 |
| FS45 | Resources | Cash Collection | Stop taking cash for car parks, depot and CSC ATM. (saving is the cash contract costs less projected increase in card fees) . | | | £58,640 | £0 | £58,640 | Y | During COVID no cash has been taken due to safety reasons, the alternative provision for those using the ATM has been to use the post office. This could be continued into 2021/22 to determine whether this causes any issues. NB: If car park card machine software goes off line no income can be taken | 1 April 2021 | 45,000 | 5,000 |
| NEW | Resources | | Cease the graduate scheme | | | | | | Y | This is in addition the saving shown above and would mean no graduate resource from 1 October 2021 (GF saving increases to £98K in 2022/23). This is likely to impact on the succession planning in the Estates team. | 1 October 2021 | 67,114 | 16,663 |
| TOTAL | | | | £ 170,000 | 8 | £ 4,648,420 | £ 1,335,540 | £ 5,983,960 | | | | £455,392 | £241,546 |

GROWTH PROPOSALS & KNOWN BUDGET PRESSURES 2021/22

| Fund | GF | HRA |
|-----------|----------|----------|
| Growth | £98,966 | £141,190 |
| Pressures | £41,540 | £20,460 |
| Total | £140,506 | £161,650 |

| Ref No | Name of Service | Description of Growth Proposal | Ongoing (Y/N) or No of | Impact of Growth Proposal on Public/ Customers/ Staff/ Members/Partnerships etc (include any impact on key corporate programmes/performance indicator measures) . | Potential Timing | % General Fund (note 1) Finance can | £ General Fund Year 1 | £ HRA Year 1 |
|--------|-----------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
|--------|-----------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|

REVENUE GROWTH - New Proposals / Services

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---|---|--|-----------------|-----|----------------|-----------------|
| G1 | SDS | New Commercial Officer post (to help deliver the Cooperative Commercial & Insourcing Strategy - Salary TBC, growth figure assumes inclusion of on-costs) | Y | To provide additional resource to help delivery the new cooperative, commercial and insourcing strategy. This is in addition to the Commercial Manager post. | 01 January 2021 | 60% | £33,000 | £22,000 |
| G4 | Communtiy Safety | Mainstream No More -Core | Y | Community safety- support for those with multiple and complex needs who are either housed by or present to the council. | 2021/22 | 75% | £37,500 | £12,500 |
| G5 | Information Governance | Enhanced Information Governance Service. We currently have one role covering statutory responsibilities with regard to Information Governance and Data Protection, including GDPR responsibilities and FOI requests. The proposal is to create an additional information Officer (Permanent) There is also a requirement for non-salary costs to cover membership renewals, licenses etc. | Y | Enables SBC to meet statutory responsibilities with regard to Information Governance and Data Protection, including GDPR responsibilities. The current manager's time is taken up with responding to Subject Access Requests and FOI requests, and there is a high risk that we will not meet statutory deadlines. The impact of not resourcing this area is increased risk of: Regulatory enforcement action for non-compliance by the ICO. Monetary penalties and fines of up to €10m for potential breaches of data protection laws Legal claims/class actions for breaches of data protection by customers Adverse impact on service delivery with team members time spent assisting complaint investigations/ appeals regarding mis-handling of personal data Regulatory enforcement action for non-compliance by the ICO. Loss of customer trust and confidence in council's handling of customer information. Adverse publicity from press coverage of complaints and/ or from publication of enforcement action taken by the regulator. | 01 April 2021 | 70% | £28,466 | £12,200 |
| G7 | Housing Management | Housing Older Person Strategy post | Y | A post is required to deliver the draft Housing Older persons strategy which will be presented at the December Executive. The Strategy identifies 4 broad themes, Development standard and design, information and advice, support and assistance and Inter organisational working. The strategy has an action plan attached to it which this post will ensure is delivered to ensure the aims of the strategy are met. Existing resources will contribute to the delivery, but this post will pull the work together. | 2021/22 | 0% | £0 | £34,584 |
| G8 | Housing Asset Management | Aids and Adapts Co-ordinator | Y | This post will be required to provide older and less abled tenants who wish to consider their housing and related care options or who have been declined adaptations, with the necessary information and advice to enable them to make an informed choice. | 2021/22 | 0% | £0 | £29,954 |
| G9 | Housing Management | Systems Admin Support | Y | In recognition that the Housing Services are continually developing and transforming additional modules have been purchased in the Northgate suite of modules. With the increased functionality comes a need to ensure that the team, testing where upgrades are released and understanding bugs in the system are adequately resourced to support these modules and keep them up to date. | 2021/22 | 0% | £0 | £29,954 |
| TOTAL GROWTH OPTIONS | | | | | | | £98,966 | £141,190 |

SERVICE PRESSURES - These are budget pressures over the next 3 years

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|---------------|---|---|---------|-----|----------------|----------------|
| G15 | ICT | ICT pressures | Y | Unavoidable ICT licensing and upgrade costs. This includes upgrade to the Real Asset Management system used by finance, additional costs for Java licensing, and licensing costs for Robotic Process Automation to support digital transformation | 2021/22 | 67% | £41,540 | £20,460 |
| TOTAL SERVICE PRESSURES | | | | | | | £41,540 | £20,460 |

TOTAL GROWTH AND SERVICE

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| £140,506 | £161,650 |
|-----------------|-----------------|

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HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FEES AND CHARGE PROPOSED 2021/22 APPENDIX D

| FEES AND CHARGES -RECOMMENDED FEE INCREASES FOR 2021/22 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|----------------------|---|---|---------------|------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Service | Description of Chargeable Service | 2020/21 Price £ GROSS FEE PAID BY CUSTOMER | NET FEE (2021/22) | VAT (exemption can be applied for on certain fees) | 2021/22 GROSS FEE PAYABLE BY CUSTOMER | Increase £ | increase % | Total Budget 2020/21 £ | Budget Increase £ | Total Budget 2021/22 £ | Options considered/Rationale |
| Housing Revenue Account | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Supported Housing: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Guest Bedrooms | All schemes other than those listed below (per night, per person) | £12.00 | £10.42 | £2.08 | £12.50 | £0.50 | 4.17% | | | | |
| | Norman Court/Hobbs Ct/Gladstone Ct/Shafesbury Ct/Truro/ Pitt Court/Grosvenor Ct per night. (any bedsit type guest room, per night, per person) | £21.50 | £18.75 | £3.75 | £22.50 | £1.00 | 4.65% | | | | With the exception of Norman Court, officers to look at converting some of these guest rooms to convert them into accommodation - |
| Short Stay Units | Assessment (per day) | £11.00 | £11.50 | £0.00 | £11.50 | £0.50 | 4.55% | | | | |
| | Other, including an element of support (per day) | £21.50 | £22.50 | £0.00 | £22.50 | £1.00 | 4.65% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 10,300 | 330 | 10,630 | |
| Laundry Charges | Sheltered schemes first wash (per week) | £3.00 | £2.63 | £0.52 | £3.15 | £0.15 | 5.00% | | | | |
| | Second wash and thereafter | £3.00 | £2.63 | £0.52 | £3.15 | £0.15 | 5.00% | | | | |
| | Guest bedrooms and short stay (per wash) | £3.00 | £2.63 | £0.52 | £3.15 | £0.15 | 5.00% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 7,000 | 270 | 7,270 | |
| Room Hire | Hairdressing at Silkin/Fred Millard, (Hourly charge) * | £3.60 | £4.17 | £0.83 | £5.00 | £1.40 | 38.89% | | | | |
| | Private chiropodist and other services, (per hour) * | £3.60 | £4.17 | £0.83 | £5.00 | £1.40 | 38.89% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 1,400 | 200 | 1,600 | |
| Support Services and careline for HRA tenants | Sheltered housing support * (includes all services shown under careline alarms) | £19.00 | £19.65 | £0.00 | £19.65 | £0.65 | 3.42% | | 6,000 | 6,000 | Change of supplier has reduced the cost to £1. |
| | SIM Careline Unit (additional weekly charge) | £2.50 | £0.83 | £0.17 | £1.00 | £-1.50 | -60.00% | | | | |
| | independent living and flexi care support charge for previous hHRS protected clients and new residents entitled to HB | £6.00 | £8.00 | £0.00 | £8.00 | £2.00 | 33.33% | | 62,400 | 63,000 | |
| | response service for new customers (50 weeks) | £8.28 | £7.20 | £1.44 | £8.64 | £0.36 | 4.35% | | 600 | | |
| | Response service to other provider equipment (50 weeks)* | £4.68 | £4.10 | £0.82 | £4.92 | £0.24 | 5.13% | | | | |
| | Monitoring only service (50 weeks) * | £3.60 | £3.10 | £0.62 | £3.72 | £0.12 | 3.33% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 135,280 | 69,000 | 204,280 | |
| Careline Alarm- private (Shortfall funded from General Fund) | Response service (52 weeks) * | £8.28 | £7.20 | £1.44 | £8.64 | £0.36 | 4.35% | | | | Previously charged for 50 weeks per year; amended to 52 week charging from 2021/22 |
| | Response service out of area (52 weeks)* | £8.28 | £7.20 | £1.44 | £8.64 | £0.36 | 4.35% | | | | |
| | Response service to other provider equipment (52 weeks)* | £4.68 | £4.10 | £0.82 | £4.92 | £0.24 | 5.13% | | | | |
| | Monitoring only service (52 weeks) * | £3.60 | £3.10 | £0.62 | £3.72 | £0.12 | 3.33% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 123,900 | 2,500 | 126,400 | This Saving (£2,500) is for the GENERAL FUND - shown on there as a "one liner" - and only shown here for REFERENCE |
| | Careline (Winkhouse) keys* | £12.60 | £11.00 | £2.20 | £13.20 | £0.60 | 4.76% | | | | |
| | Fobs - Sheltered Schemes (Black) | £21.30 | £17.92 | £3.58 | £21.50 | £0.20 | 0.94% | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---|
| Replacement Pendants Key safe | Fobs - Sheltered Schemes (Shark) | £12.75 | £10.83 | £2.17 | £13.00 | £0.25 | 1.96% | | | | |
| | All Pendants | £51.00 | £43.75 | £8.75 | £52.50 | £1.50 | 2.94% | | | | |
| | Supply | £20.65 | £17.71 | £3.54 | £21.25 | £0.60 | 2.91% | | | | |
| | Fit | £59.50 | £50.83 | £10.17 | £61.00 | £1.50 | 2.52% | | | | |
| Lock Change | | £85.75 | £73.75 | £14.75 | £88.50 | £2.75 | 3.21% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 3,500 | 80 | 3,580 | |
| General Needs Tenants and Leaseholders: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Key Fobs | Old Style "Black fobs" | £21.30 | £18.33 | £3.67 | £22.00 | £0.70 | 3.29% | | | | |
| Communal door entry keys | New "Shark" Fobs* | £12.75 | £10.83 | £2.17 | £13.00 | £0.25 | 1.96% | | | | |
| | Replacement keys for entry doors to flat blocks. | £20.00 | £17.17 | £3.43 | £20.60 | £0.60 | 3.00% | 1,230 | 30 | 1,260 | |
| Laundry charges - Roundmead, Brent and Harrow | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Wash tokens | £5.55 | £4.79 | £0.96 | £5.75 | £0.20 | 3.60% | | | | |
| | Dry Tokens | £3.00 | £2.58 | £0.52 | £3.10 | £0.10 | 3.33% | | | | |
| Management Fees for Westwood Court & Kilner Close | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Administration Fees | £0.80 | £0.83 | £0.17 | £1.00 | £0.20 | 25.00% | 6,890 | 200 | 7,090 | |
| | | | | | | | | 8,120 | 230 | 8,350 | |
| Stores | | £5.00 | £6.00 | £0.00 | £6.00 | £1.00 | 20.00% | 13,500 | 2,020 | 15,520 | |
| Lock change | Callout | £131.00 | £116.67 | £23.33 | £140.00 | £9.00 | 6.87% | 0 | | | |
| | Admin charge | £44.00 | £41.67 | £8.33 | £50.00 | £6.00 | 13.64% | 10,180 | 820 | | |
| | Charge | POA | Price on Application (is VATABLE) | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 23,680 | 2,840 | 26,520 | |
| Retrospective Charges | | £150.00 | £200.00 | £0.00 | £200.00 | £50.00 | 33.33% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 5,000 | 1,000 | 6,000 | |
| Leasehold charges for services - VAT not applicable. All fees | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Solicitors enquiries/standard pre-sale enquiries* | 10 working day response | £165.00 | £166.00 | £0.00 | £166.00 | £1.00 | 0.61% | | | | |
| | 3 working day response | £247.50 | £250.00 | £0.00 | £250.00 | £2.50 | 1.01% | | | | |
| Solicitors enquiries/standard pre-sale enquiries* | Re-mortgage enquiries* | Enquiries raised at a time of remortgaging | £57.00 | £60.00 | £0.00 | £60.00 | £3.00 | 5.26% | | | |
| Copy of lease* | fee for providing a copy of the lease | £31.00 | £32.00 | £0.00 | £32.00 | £1.00 | 3.23% | | | | |
| Requests for landlord's consent* | where leaseholder wants to carry out alterations - permission must be sought from SBC. | £103.00 | £105.00 | £0.00 | £105.00 | £2.00 | 1.94% | | | | |
| | charge for inspection post completion of works | £51.50 | £55.00 | £0.00 | £55.00 | £3.50 | 6.80% | | | | |
| Retrospective landlord's consent* | where leaseholder is seeking permission for works carried out retrospectively. | £206.00 | £225.00 | £0.00 | £225.00 | £19.00 | 9.22% | | | | |
| | additional inspection fee | £51.50 | £55.00 | £0.00 | £55.00 | £3.50 | 6.80% | | | | |
| Copies of quarterly service charge invoice* | additional inspection fee | £5.25 | £20.00 | £0.00 | £20.00 | £14.75 | 280.95% | | | | Statements are available on-line free of charge |
| Copies of service charge estimate or actual statement* | additional inspection fee | £5.25 | £20.00 | £0.00 | £20.00 | £14.75 | 280.95% | | | | Statements are available on-line free of charge |
| Deed of Postponement | | £85.00 | £87.00 | £0.00 | £87.00 | £2.00 | 2.35% | | | | |
| Notice of Charge | | £25.00 | £25.50 | £0.00 | £25.50 | £0.50 | 2.00% | | | | |
| Notice of Transfer | | £25.00 | £25.50 | £0.00 | £25.50 | £0.50 | 2.00% | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 0 | | 0 | |
| GRAND TOTAL | | | | | | | | £318,180 | £76,450 | £394,630 | |

Notes

- charges are rounded to the nearest 5p
- All charges are inclusive of VAT @ 20% with the exception of items marked with an *
- Careline and Community Support are subject to VAT for private residents unless they complete an exemption declaration.

Additional Income (fees & charges)

£76,450

Less: £2,500 (G Fund Saving)**£73,950**

**APPENDIX E: RISK BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BALANCES
2021/22**

| Potential Risk Area | Comments including any mitigation factors | | |
|--|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Income from areas within the base budget where the Council raises "Fees and Charges" | Potential risk that the budgeted level of income from activities where the Council is charging for services will not be achieved. This is anticipated largely to be as a result of the downturn in economy and COVID, but could also be as a result of increased void rates, lower collection rates, disputed bills, All "fees and charges" income is reviewed as part of the monthly/quarterly budget monitoring process. All budgets are profiled over the year based upon previous experience. | | |
| | | Calculated Risk | |
| Specific Areas | Estimated Income | Risk assessed at | Balances Required |
| Rechargeable works not raised or recovered | £153,790 | 10.00% | £15,379 |
| Leaseholder charges not realised (excluding insurance) | £887,590 | 5.00% | £44,380 |
| Rental income (increase in voids rates) | £40,843,590 | 0.75% | £306,327 |
| Service Charges (increase in voids rates) | £1,679,960 | 0.75% | £12,600 |
| Heating charges | £242,110 | 5.00% | £12,106 |
| Total | | | £390,791 |

| Potential Risk Area | Comments | | |
|--|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Demand Led Budgets | Potential risk that spending on parts of the budget where the Council has a legal duty to provide the service increases significantly, including due to COVID. Individual budgets reviewed as part of the monthly budget monitoring process. All budgets are profiled over the year based upon previous experience and so any variances should show up during the year. | | |
| | | Calculated Risk | |
| Specific Areas | Estimated Exposure | Risk assessed at | Balances Required |
| Storm damage and fire damage uninsured costs (excess is £25,000 for fire damage) | £25,000 | 100.00% | £25,000 |
| Response and Emergency repairs increase as a result of inflationary pressures or unforeseen repairs | £7,595,760 | 5.00% | £379,788 |
| Unforeseen Capital works not budgeted for requiring a contribution to capital (based on a proportion of the capital programme) | £51,649,050 | 2.00% | £1,032,981 |
| Inflation pressures on capital works requiring additional revenue resources to fund the shortfall | £51,649,050 | 0.75% | £387,368 |
| Insufficient budget identified for damp and mould works | £250,000 | 10.00% | £25,000 |

**APPENDIX E: RISK BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BALANCES
2021/22**

| | | | |
|--|----------|-------|-------------------|
| Cost of decanting tenants from redevelopment sites is higher than budgeted for | £330,000 | 5.00% | £16,500 |
| Total | | | £1,866,637 |

| Potential Risk Area | Comments including any mitigation factors | | |
|---|--|------------------------|-------------------|
| Changes since budget was set | Potential risk that things change since the budget estimates were made and the estimates are then under budgeted for | | |
| | | Calculated Risk | |
| Specific Areas | Estimated Exposure | Risk assessed at | Balances Required |
| Increase in borrowing costs for internal borrowing | £4,857,066 | 0.25% | £12,143 |
| Transitional Vacancy Rate 4.5% not achieved | £218,630 | 10.00% | £21,863 |
| Increase in bad debt provision | £224,220 | 10.00% | £22,422 |
| Utility inflation (Electricity increase in April 2018, Gas increase from Oct 2018) | £626,260 | 5.00% | £31,313 |
| NEW pay award is higher than budgeted for | £7,693,340 | 0.00% | £20,630 |
| Total | | | £108,371 |

| Potential Risk Area | Comments including any mitigation factors | | |
|--|---|------------------------|-------------------|
| Income from areas within the base budget where the Council raises "Fees and Charges" | Potential risk that changes in government policy and legislation mean income from activities where the Council is charging for services will not be achieved. | | |
| | | Calculated Risk | |
| Specific Areas | Estimated Income | Risk assessed at | Balances Required |
| Increased Right to buys as a result of Government initiatives reducing the amount of collectable rent. Assume an additional 20 RTB's increasing the number to 65 in 2021 | £98,582 | 50.00% | £49,291 |
| NEW higher rent arrears as a result of COVID | £500,000 | 2.50% | £12,500 |
| Total | | | £61,791 |

| Potential Risk Area | Comments including any mitigation factors | | |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
|---------------------|---|--|--|

**APPENDIX E: RISK BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BALANCES
2021/22**

| | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Other Risks | Potential risk that savings options will not be realised as a result of delay or unforeseen circumstances. | | |
| | | Calculated Risk | |
| Specific Areas | Estimated Exposure | Risk assessed at | Balances Required |
| Savings Options delayed or not realised | £224,883 | 15.00% | £33,732 |
| Total | | | £33,732 |

| | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Potential Risk Area | Comments including any mitigation factors | | |
| Estimated balances required for any over spend or under -recovery of expenditure | This calculation replaces the calculation based on Net Expenditure | | |
| | | Calculated Risk | |
| Specific Areas | Estimated Exposure | Risk assessed at | Balances Required |
| Gross Expenditure (excluding fixed interest costs and depreciation and RCCO) | £24,945,477.00 | 1.50% | £374,182 |
| Total | | | £374,182 |

| | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Potential Risk Area | Comments including any mitigation factors | | |
| Greater exposure to interest rate changes | Moving from RCCOs to new borrowing to support capital increases the risk of higher borrowing costs due to increased interest rates. | | |
| | | Calculated Risk | |
| Specific Areas | Estimated Exposure | Risk assessed at | Balances Required |
| General allowance in the balances to meet any potential increased cost of borrowing (new 2021/22 loans) | £26,602,339 | 0.56% | £149,239 |
| Total | | | £149,239 |

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Level of Balances Assumed in Housing Revenue Account Based on risk | £2,985,000 |
| Balances held for future debt and capital programme. | £22,800,041 |
| Total Required balances | £25,785,041 |

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Equality at Stevenage Borough Council

Stevenage Borough Council as a service provider, employer and community leader is committed to achieving equal opportunities for everyone. We want to deliver services that are fair, accessible and open to everyone who needs them.

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are an important part of the process in ensuring that our intention is translated into action. They help to ensure that decisions are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different people in the community.

Based on the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, the EqIA considers the impact on the following groups when making decisions, updating policies and starting new projects:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marital status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

Although non-statutory, the Council has chosen to adopt the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion in considering the impact on people in terms of their social or economic background.

EqIAs also help the Council to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). The Duty states that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under this Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Savings Proposals 2021/22

Prior to their consideration at Executive in December 2020, all savings proposals were reviewed to determine any potential impact on Stevenage residents in terms of their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Some of these have no public impact and so have not been subject to any further EqIA.

Where a negative, positive or disproportionate impact is likely, Assistant Directors and other appropriate managers have drafted Brief or Full EqIAs. These have been summarised over the following pages and will inform the recommendations made at Executive on 20/1/2021 and 10/2/2021. Action to further analyse or mitigate the impact on equality groups is identified where appropriate.

The following activity has taken/will take place:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| December 2020 – February 2021 | EqIAs finalised considering further evidence as necessary |
| January and February 2021 | Consideration of all completed EqIAs at Council meetings |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|---|--|---|-------------------------------|
| FS23 | CSC and Customer-Focus redesign and efficiencies. | <p>Full – Unequal Impact</p> <p>Overview Overall the proposal will not have negative impacts as we aim to maintain current service levels. Customers will still be able to access services over the telephone or access services face to face.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online which may overlap with many of the protected characteristics.</p> <p>Age Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.</p> <p>If the Council stopped providing telephone or face to face support that could be to the detriment of those older people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online.</p> <p>Disability People with some types of disability may have difficulties using or making the most of digital technologies. These people may benefit less from enhanced digital channels.</p> <p>Socio-Economic</p> | <p>Measure the take up of digital services by different groups and use the insight to design future services.</p> <p>Ensure the customer service model supports those who cannot benefit from digital channels by providing alternatives.</p> | Ruth Luscombe/ Greg Arends |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| | | <p>Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p> | | |
| FS25 | Print Room | <p>Brief – Unequal Impact</p> <p>Overview This saving involves the closing of the print room and the putting into place of alternative arrangements including paperless committee meetings, digital alternatives and directing work through Docmail print service.</p> <p>Age Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact on older people. Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.</p> <p>Socio-Economic Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact some socio economic groups. Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging</p> | Complete Full EQIA assessment. | Ruth Luscombe |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|
| | | with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online. | | |
| FS43 | Reduce Professional Training Budget | <p>Brief – Unknown / Neutral Impact</p> <p>Overview This proposed saving involves the reduction of the professional training budget. Where possible professional qualifications would be paid for by the apprenticeship levy.</p> <p>Currently no workforce information is monitored on the take up of learning and development opportunities by protected characteristic group.</p> <p>However, learning and development opportunities are available and taken up by all staff regardless of their background. In response to the Covid pandemic more learning and development offers are available virtually.</p> | Record protected characteristics data on staff completing learning and development courses | Clare Davies/ Kirsten Frew |
| FS44 | Reduce Graduate Training Budget. | <p>Brief – Insignificant Impact</p> <p>Overview This proposed saving involves the reduction of the graduate training budget. The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore the protected characteristics have not identified in the EQIA for reasons of anonymity.</p> <p>However, all graduates at SBC are from the National Local</p> | | Clare Davies/ Kirsten Frew |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| | | development Government Scheme and have a full learning and programme. | | |
| FS45 | Stop taking cash payments for Car Parks, depot and CSC ATM. | <p>Brief – Equal Impact</p> <p>Overview We know that Cash represented only 1.17% of payments collected last year and alternative means are available for all services. This saving proposes that the council stop collecting cash in order to support financial security.</p> <p>We do not know who pays for car parking in cash. However there are a number of alternatives, including card for car parks and phone payments for on street parking.</p> <p>Socio-Economic Those small minorities of people who may not have a bank account may be negatively impacted. Cash payments which would have been made to Customer Services can still be made via the Post Office.</p> | Keep payment options under review in response to customer feedback | Ruth Luscombe |
| FS19 | Combine the Residents and Star Surveys | <p>Brief – Positive / Negative / Unequal Impact</p> <p>Overview This proposal suggests combining the Town-wide Resident Survey and the Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey (STAR). There are also plans to undertake other complementary community engagement activities.</p> <p>Age - Older People</p> | <p>Establish the revised Resident/STAR survey sampling/questionnaire approach</p> <p>Develop an engagement plan incorporating both the Resident/STAR survey</p> | Rob Gregory/ Katrina Shirley |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|------------------------|---|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| | | <p>It will not be possible within a combined, shorter survey to ask specific additional questions to Independent Living Scheme tenants, and the number of responses from these tenants will be lower. This may be mitigated through a separate engagement activity.</p> <p>Age - Younger People As the Resident Survey is targeted at householders, the profile of respondents is inherently older than the general resident population. By undertaking other engagement activity specifically targeted at younger people, the views of this group will be better captured.</p> <p>Sex/Age/Ethnic Origin/Disability/Marital & Working Status The surveys collect information in respect of sex, age, ethnic origin, disability, marital status and working status. This enables some analysis of the profile of tenants and residents to be undertaken and enables significant differences to be identified.</p> <p>However, all results are subject to sampling tolerances and not all differences are statistically significant. By complementing the surveys with a range of focused engagement activities, a greater diversity of views can be captured.</p> <p>Religion or Belief/Gender Reassignment /Sexual Orientation</p> | and other engagement activities | |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| | | <p>Previous surveys have not analysed results in relation to religion, gender reassignment and sexual orientation. Plans to undertake further engagement activities will provide the opportunity to capture the views of these protected characteristic groups.</p> | | |
| <p>HRA Rent & Service Charge</p> | <p>Rent and service charge setting for 2021/22</p> | <p><u>Overall</u></p> <p>The aim of the rent and service charge policy is to provide a fair method of calculating rents and service charges for all the Council's tenants. It also aligns with the Council's Concessions for Fees and Charges Policy and the principle of recovering the cost of providing services.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p> <p>Tenants benefited from four years of rent reduction from 2016-2020, so the impact of the rent increase is mitigated partially by having to use a lower base than it would have been had there not been a mandatory rent reduction (cumulative) of 1 % per annum for four years.</p> <p><u>Unequal/Negative Impact</u></p> <p>Age</p> <p>A proportion of tenants may see an increase in service charges in any given year. The majority of tenants who are charged for services live in flats and/or flexicare/independent living accommodation. Data indicates that the age profile of</p> | <p>Publish rent increase information on the website to start preparing tenants.</p> <p>The rent notification letter will offer tenants the opportunity to discuss any queries they have with staff.</p> <p>Make links to clear support and guidance on all of our communication platforms</p> <p>Prepare staff to enable them to respond effectively and empathetically with tenants.</p> <p>Consult with residents</p> | <p>Jaine Cresser/ Elizabeth Ddamulira</p> |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| | | <p>tenants of flexicare/independent living accommodation is older than those in the general needs stock. The age profile of tenants living in general needs flats is younger than for the SBC housing stock as a whole.</p> <p>For people living in independent living/flexicare schemes, in addition to basic rent and service charges, those who pay for the support/emergency response services that are not eligible for Housing benefit may also see an increase in the overall payment due each week.</p> <p>Disability Northgate data on tenants in relation to disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. However, to give some context, the data indicated that the proportion of tenants in flexicare/independent living accommodation with a disability was almost double the proportion for the whole SBC tenant population. As referred to above, most flexicare/independent living housing will be subject to service and support charges.</p> <p>The proportion of tenants living in flat blocks declaring a disability was very similar to the proportion living in all properties; therefore a disproportionate impact on these tenants is not anticipated.</p> <p>Socio Economic The rent increase will be applied across all tenancies prescribed by the Work and Welfare Reform Act and in line with the current Rent Standard Direction, regardless of socio-</p> | throughout 2021/22 to establish the impact and put in place systems to mitigate this. | |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|------------------------------|
| | | <p>economic circumstances. Those who receive services for which a service charge is made will be charged the actual cost of those services.</p> <p>Those reliant on Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit (UC) housing costs to cover their full rent and eligible service charges will not be affected by the increase in rent and service charges as their benefit award will be recalculated.</p> <p>The COVID19 pandemic has caused unemployment and unstable employment. Residents experiencing exceptional economic hardship who are unable to work due to a duty to self-isolate are receiving a drop in earnings.</p> <p>The policy allows for capping of service charges, subject to any legal constraints. As a means of mitigating the impact of an increase that would cause hardship, the Council may subsidise the costs.</p> <p>Support provision for this group has been increased as part of an income recovery action plan. This includes additional staffing resources.</p> | | |
| HRA support charge | Increase contribution to support costs to £8 per week | <p>Overall This applies to residents living in independent living/flexicare housing that are in receipt of housing benefit, fairer charging, universal credit (UC) or are 2003 protected (i.e. those in the service prior to the government supporting people grant funding starting in 2003). As at 20 November 2020 this affects 595 people. The remaining residents in independent living/flexicare already pay the full charge.</p> | To ensure that the charge is explained as clearly as possible when the support charge notification is sent, there will be a FAQ sheet and details | Jaine Cresser/ Karen Long |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|------------------------|---|---|-----------------|
| | | <p><u>Positive Impact</u></p> <p>Socio Economic Results from the STAR survey in 2018 have shown that residents identified the emergency alarm service and the supported housing officer as the 2nd and 3rd most important priority associated with living in their property. The application of the support charge will help to ensure that the Council can continue to deliver this service.</p> <p><u>Negative Impact:</u></p> <p>Age Residents of independent living and flexicare schemes who will have to pay the increased charge are predominantly older people. Conversely however, the costs are currently subsidised by the wider tenant population, who have a younger age profile and do not benefit from the service.</p> <p>Disability The residents who are charged a support charge are predominantly older and disabled people as this accommodation is for people over 55 years old or for people with a disability.</p> <p>Socio Economic The support charge is not eligible for housing benefit and could have a negative impact for those on lower incomes in terms of affordability.</p> | <p>on the website.</p> <p>Review whether any elements of the independent living service should be eligible for housing benefit.</p> | |

| Saving Ref | Saving/Income proposed | Summary of potential impact | Action | Contact Officer |
|------------|------------------------|--|--------|-----------------|
| | | <p>This group of residents may also be affected by increases in Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) charges affecting the overall amount that older and disabled people can afford to pay.</p> <p>However, the introduction of the charge is considered to be fairer than under current arrangements, whereby support charge costs are subsidised by the wider tenant population who do not benefit from the service.</p> <p>Furthermore, the charge has been introduced on an incremental basis, to mitigate the impact, rather than applying the full amount of £19.65 per week in one 'hit'.</p> <p>In addition, HCC have confirmed that they will be continuing with our flexicare support contract until end March 2022, which will mean that this will help offset some of the costs that we would have had to pass on to this group of residents.</p> <p>We currently have 3 people that have made nil payment of the support charge either since the introduction of the contribution charge or since moving in. As at 20 November 2020 there are 71 people who are in arrears over £30 totalling £12,384. This is likely to increase when the new charge starts in April 2021.</p> | | |

Full Equality Impact Assessment

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

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---|--|-----------------|--|
| What is being assessed? | | FS23 – Savings to Customer Service Centre and Customer Focus Service | | | |
| Lead Assessor | Ruth Luscombe | | | Assessment team | |
| Start date | | End date | | | |
| When will the EqIA be reviewed? | April 2021 | | | | |

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Who may be affected by it? | Council customers (residents, businesses, voluntary organisations and other partners), Customer Service Centre and Customer Focus staff |
| What are the key aims of it? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect current service levels while delivering structural savings by reducing avoidable demand and increasing self-service through digital channels. • Improve customer awareness of digital channels and encourage take up • Enable better value for money customer service and complaints handling provision • Improve consistency and transparency through adopting enhanced digital case management for complaints. • Embed insight and continuous improvement as a core part of the Customer Service model |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | | |
| Remove discrimination & harassment | | Promote equal opportunities | A new website launched in September 2020 to meet government accessibility guidelines | Encourage good relations | Improved access channels for customers and staff, digital options available 24/7 |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?</p> | <p>Desk research drawing on a broad range of national (Office Of National Statistics), local survey research (STAR survey 2017, 'Big Knock' 2017), MySociety.org website as well as examples from other councils (Cambridge City Council, Sutton Council)</p> |
|--|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?</p> | <p>Overall the proposal will not have negative impacts as we aim to maintain current service levels as our customers increasingly choose to adopt digital self-service channels. Customers will still be able to access services over the telephone, or where required access services face to face by booking an appointment. This proposal has been enabled by our Connected to our Customers (CTOC) programme which has delivered a new website & digital platform, as well as an online portal for housing, and enhancements to waste processes e.g. for missed collections. An EQIA has been undertaken for this programme and will be kept under review.</p> <p>As technology evolves, (and is adopted by different communities differently) the ways in which people can be excluded or disadvantaged will change too. We will need to review our digital access solutions regularly to ensure changes in requirements are identified and potential solutions agreed on.</p> |
|---|---|

Evidence and impact assessment

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

| Age | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|--|----------------|---|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | | Unequal impact | X |
| <p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p> | <p>Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.</p> | | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| | | <p>Older people are much less likely to use the internet than other age groups. In 2019, 47% of adults in the UK aged 75 years or over had used the internet in the last 3 months, compared to 91% of all adults.</p> <p>During Housing's 2017 'Big Knock' Tenants Survey, 77% of all respondents reported having access to the internet. (This result compares to STAR survey which indicated 74% of residents using internet at home and further 9% outside of home). Of the 23% that don't have access, 76% were over 65 years old. 48% of over 75 year olds reported to having access to the internet, which is similar to the national statistics.</p> <p>If the Council stopped providing telephone or face to face support that could be to the detriment of those older people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online; however this is not an aim of this proposal and we are retaining these more traditional channels.</p> | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Disability e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness | | | |
|--|--|----------------|---|
| Positive impact | Negative impact | Unequal impact | X |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | <p>People with some types of disability may have difficulties using or making the most of digital technologies, which may not be adapted to their needs related to their specific disability. These people may benefit less from enhanced digital channels.</p> <p>Disabled people are less likely to use the internet than people without disabilities. In 2019 78% of disabled adults (10 million) in the UK used the internet, which is a massive increase compared with 25% in 2016, but still significantly lower than the all adult rate of 95% (ONS 2019). Although disabled people are reported to be less likely to continue using the internet after they have first accessed it. The difference between internet use in disabled and non-disabled adults was greater in the older age groups.</p> | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| | | <p>For adults aged 75 years and over, 41% of disabled adults and 54% of non-disabled adults were recent internet users. In comparison, there was only a small difference in recent internet use for disabled and non-disabled adults in the 16 to 24 age group; 98% of disabled adults and 99% of non-disabled adults in this age group were recent internet users.</p> <p>There are a number of tools (software and hardware) available now to make that more possible, we continue through the CTOC programme to explore their feasibility and future implementation. The Council also plans to continue to provide assisted digital approaches and, where necessary for those who cannot engage digitally, more traditional channels or routes through which people with these characteristics can engage with us.</p> | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Gender reassignment | | | |
|--|---|--|----------------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Marriage or civil partnership | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------|----------------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| information you used to support this assessment | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Pregnancy & maternity | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Positive impact | Negative impact | Unequal impact | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Race | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Positive impact | Negative impact | Unequal impact | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Religion or belief | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--|
| Positive impact | Negative impact | Unequal impact | |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Sex | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Positive impact | Negative impact | Unequal impact | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Sexual orientation e.g. straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Positive impact | Negative impact | Unequal impact | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Socio-economic¹ e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| Positive impact | Negative impact | Unequal impact | X |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | <p>Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p> <p>People living in social housing are less likely to access the internet than people living in other housing tenures. During Housing’s 2017 ‘Big Knock’ Tenants Survey 23% of all respondents reported not having access to the internet (the same results were also received during the STAR survey).</p> <p>The evidence also suggests that people on low incomes are less likely to have digital access and basic digital skills. Nationally, 17% of people earning less than £20,000 never use the internet, as opposed to 2% of people earning more than £40,000. 44% of people without basic digital skills are on lower wages or are unemployed.</p> <p>People with any of the protected characteristics may be more vulnerable to poverty, and may therefore be at greater risk of digital exclusion, which may be exacerbated by inter-sectionality between their characteristics and their income.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online.</p> | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

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

Other

please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts

| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|----------------|--|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | | Unequal impact | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | Our research has not identified any particular negative impacts (or differential impacts) | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | | |

What are the findings of any consultation with:

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|------------|--|
| Staff? | | Residents? | |
| Voluntary & community sector? | | Partners? | |
| Other stakeholders? | | | |

Overall conclusion & future activity

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

Detail the **actions that are needed** as a result of this assessment and how they will help to **remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities** and / or **encourage good relations**:

| Action | Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage? | Responsible officer | Deadline | How will this be embedded as business as usual? |
|--|---|---------------------|-----------------|---|
| Measure the take up of digital services by different groups and use the insight to design future services | Promote equal opportunities | Ruth Luscombe | From April 2021 | As part of the new customer service model |
| Ensure the customer service model supports those who cannot benefit from digital channels by providing alternatives. | Promote equal opportunities | Ruth Luscombe | From April 2021 | As part of the new customer service model |

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Ruth Luscombe

Date: 18.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

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| | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|----------|-----|
| What is being assessed? | FS25 – Closing the Print Room | What are the key aims of it? | Remove the document centre staff post and put in place alternative arrangements including paperless committee meetings, digital alternatives and directing work through Docmail print service. | | |
| Who may be affected by it? | Staff, Councillors and Customers | | | | |
| Date of full EqIA on service area (planned or completed) | April 2021 | | | | |
| Form completed by: | Ruth Luscombe | Start date | June 2021 | End date | n/a |
| | | Review date | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| What data / information are you using to inform your assessment? | ONS Data, Housing STAR and “Big Knock” Survey data | Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify | We need to do further analysis of the documents currently printed by the Print Service and ensure a clear alternative plan in place for each. This will be reviewed in a full EQIA. |
|--|--|--|---|

| Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is: | | | |
|---|--|------|-----|
| Age | Unequal – Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact on older people. Research evidence from ONS data suggests that older people tend to be less digitally active, and potentially at risk of digital | Race | N/A |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--------------------|-----|
| | <p>exclusion, although the picture is complex and social class / income can be a relevant factor too.</p> <p>Older people are much less likely to use the internet than other age groups. In 2019, 47% of adults in the UK aged 75 years or over had used the internet in the last 3 months, compared to 91% of all adults.</p> <p>During Housing's 2017 'Big Knock' Tenants Survey, 77% of all respondents reported having access to the internet. (This result compares to STAR survey which indicated 74% of residents using internet at home and further 9% outside of home). Of the 23% that don't have access, 76% were over 65 years old. 48% of over 75 year olds reported to having access to the internet, which is similar to the national statistics.</p> | | |
| Disability | N/A | Religion or belief | N/A |
| Gender reassignment | N/A | Sex | N/A |
| Marriage or civil partnership | N/A | Sexual orientation | N/A |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------------|--|
| Pregnancy & maternity | N/A | Socio-economic ² | <p>Unequal – Digital alternatives to printed documents may disproportionately impact some socio economic groups. Low income, social class and social housing tenancy have been identified in some research as indicators of whether someone is likely to have the competence, confidence and capability to make the most of digital technologies.</p> <p>People living in social housing are less likely to access the internet than people living in other housing tenures. During Housing's 2017 'Big Knock' Tenants Survey 23% of all respondents reported not having access to the internet (the same results were also received during the STAR survey).</p> <p>The evidence also suggests that people on low incomes are less likely to have digital</p> |
|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------------|--|

²Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

| | | | |
|-------|--|--|---|
| | | | <p>access and basic digital skills. Nationally, 17% of people earning less than £20,000 never use the internet, as opposed to 2% of people earning more than £40,000. 44% of people without basic digital skills are on lower wages or are unemployed.</p> <p>People with any of the protected characteristics may be more vulnerable to poverty, and may therefore be at greater risk of digital exclusion, which may be exacerbated by intersectionality between their characteristics and their income.</p> <p>If the Council failed to provide non-digital means of engaging with it, that could be to the detriment of people who do not have the skills or capabilities to engage online.</p> |
| Other | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | |
| Remove discrimination & harassment | | Promote equal opportunities | | Encourage good relations |

What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

| Action | Responsible officer | How will this be delivered and monitored? | Deadline |
|----------------------|---------------------|---|-----------|
| Full EQIA assessment | Ruth Luscombe | Project to be set up to review the impacts and alternatives to be put in place. | June 2021 |
| | | | |

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Ruth Luscombe
Date: 18.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

| | | | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------|--|----------|---------|
| What is being assessed? | FS43 – Reduce Training Budget during 2021-22 | What are the key aims of it? | To consider the potential impact of the proposed saving of reducing the training budget for 2021/22 on all staff and particularly those under the protected characteristics. | | |
| Who may be affected by it? | | | | | |
| Date of full EqIA on service area (planned or completed) | | | | | |
| Form completed by: | Clare Davies | Start date | November 2020 | End date | Ongoing |
| | | Review date | November 2021 | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| What data / information are you using to inform your assessment? | Workforce Equalities Data as of November 2020 | Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify | Currently no workforce information is held on socio-economic status of the Stevenage Borough Council workforce and therefore this cannot be assessed. |
|--|---|--|---|

| Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is: | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|---|
| Age | We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities | Race | We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities |
| Disability | We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities | Religion or belief | We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Gender reassignment | Data for this protected characteristic is incomplete for the employees impacted by the proposed savings options. | Sex | We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities |
| Marriage or civil partnership | We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities | Sexual orientation | We do not hold data on employee characteristics for take up of learning and development opportunities |
| Pregnancy & maternity | No information is held on the pregnancy and maternity status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings. | Socio-economic ³ | No information is held on the socio-economic status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings. |
| Other | | | |

| Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| Remove discrimination & harassment | Learning and development opportunities are available and taken up by all staff regardless of their background In response to the Covid pandemic more learning and development offers | Promote equal opportunities | Access to the apprenticeship levy funded courses is available to all staff | Encourage good relations | |

³Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| | and moving to virtual platforms and this often reduces costs. | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|

What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

| Action | Responsible officer | How will this be delivered and monitored? | Deadline |
|--|---------------------|---|------------|
| Record protected characteristics data on staff completing learning and development courses | Clare Davies | Developing the HR System | April 2021 |
| | | | |

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Clare Davies
Date: 12.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

| | | | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------|---|----------|---------|
| What is being assessed? | Reduced Graduate Training Budget | What are the key aims of it? | To consider the potential impact of the proposed saving of reducing the graduate training budget for 2021/22 on all staff and particularly those under the protected characteristics. | | |
| Who may be affected by it? | | | | | |
| Date of full EqlA on service area (planned or completed) | | | | | |
| Form completed by: | Clare Davies | Start date | November 2020 | End date | Ongoing |
| | | Review date | November 2021 | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| What data / information are you using to inform your assessment? | Workforce Equalities Data as of November 2020 | Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify | Currently no workforce information is held on socio-economic status of the Stevenage Borough Council workforce and therefore this cannot be assessed. |
|--|---|--|---|

| Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is: | | | |
|---|---|------|--|
| Age | The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified. However, all graduates at SBC are from the National Local Government Scheme and have a full learning and | Race | The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified. |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|--|
| | development programme. We also have vacant posts so they will not be disproportionately impacted. | | |
| Disability | None of the employees impacted by the proposed savings have identified as disabled and therefore no disproportionate effects are anticipated. | Religion or belief | The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified. |
| Gender reassignment | Data for this protected characteristic is incomplete for the employees impacted by the proposed savings options. | Sex | The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified. |
| Marriage or civil partnership | The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified. | Sexual orientation | The number of employees impacted by the savings is less than 5 and therefore not identified. |
| Pregnancy & maternity | No information is held on the pregnancy and maternity status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings. | Socio-economic ⁴ | No information is held on the socio-economic status of the employees impacted by the proposed savings. |
| Other | | | |

Where there is a likely **positive impact**, please explain how it will help to **fulfil our legislative duties** to:

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--|
| Remove discrimination | Continue with | Promote equal | Access to the | Encourage good | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--|

⁴Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

| | | | | | |
|--------------|--|---------------|------------------------------------|-----------|--|
| & harassment | National Graduate Programme Development Programme and promote other learning opportunities | opportunities | apprenticeship levy funded courses | relations | |
|--------------|--|---------------|------------------------------------|-----------|--|

What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

| Action | Responsible officer | How will this be delivered and monitored? | Deadline |
|--------|---------------------|---|----------|
| | | | |
| | | | |

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Clare Davies
Date: 12.11.20

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

| | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------|--|----------|--|
| What is being assessed? | FS45 – Removal of cash collection | What are the key aims of it? | Stop collecting cash in order to save money, as alternative payment methods are available. | | |
| Who may be affected by it? | Residents, Businesses, Staff, Partners | | | | |
| Date of full EqIA on service area (planned or completed) | N/A | | | | |
| Form completed by: | Ruth Luscombe | Start date | | End date | |
| | | Review date | | | |

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| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| What data / information are you using to inform your assessment? | Cash represented only 1.17% of payments collected last year and alternative means are available for all services. | Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify | We do not know who pays for car parking in cash. However there are a number of alternatives available. There are health and hygiene reasons for not accepting cash during the COVID-19 pandemic – card and phone payments are available. |
|--|---|--|--|

| Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is: | | | |
|---|-----|--------------------|-----|
| Age | N/A | Race | N/A |
| Disability | N/A | Religion or belief | N/A |
| Gender reassignment | N/A | Sex | N/A |
| Marriage or civil partnership | N/A | Sexual orientation | N/A |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------------|--|
| Pregnancy & maternity | N/A | Socio-economic ⁵ | Unequal – That small minority of people who may not have a bank account may be negatively impacted. Cash payments which would have been made to Customer Services can still be made via the Post Office. |
| Other | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | |
| Remove discrimination & harassment | | Promote equal opportunities | | Encourage good relations |

What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

| Action | Responsible officer | How will this be delivered and monitored? | Deadline |
|--|---------------------|--|------------|
| If a negative or unequal (high or low) impact has been identified, you should assess this further in a Full EqIA | Ruth Luscombe | Keep payment options under review in response to customer feedback | April 2022 |
| | | | |

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Ruth Luscombe

Date: 12th November 2020

⁵Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

| | | | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|----------|--|
| What is being assessed? | <p>FS19 - Combine the Town-wide Resident Survey and the Council Tenant Satisfaction Survey (known as 'STAR'), which are now undertaken every 3 years.</p> | <p>What are the key aims of it?</p> | <p>The Town-wide survey of resident householders seeks feedback and resident perception on a range of issues and services and supports the council's priority-setting process.</p> <p>The 'STAR' survey is used across the housing sector and enables the council to assess levels of tenant and leaseholder satisfaction, to identify their priorities and to shape its services accordingly.</p> <p>The proposal is to reduce the overall cost by combining the two surveys and/or reducing the survey length/overall numbers surveyed. Additionally, there are plans to increase other community engagement activities at the co-operative neighbourhood level, which will complement the Resident and STAR surveys. These will be undertaken 'in-house' by the council's community development team, supported by other colleagues – potentially using a “big knock” approach.</p> | | |
| Who may be affected by it? | Resident householders and council tenants | | | | |
| Date of full EqlA on service area (planned or completed) | N/A | | | | |
| Form completed by: | Katrina Shirley | Start date | 14.11.20 | End date | |
| | | Review date | N/A | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p>What data / information are you using to inform your assessment?</p> | <p>SBC Resident Survey Report 2017/18 SBC STAR Survey Report SBC Community Engagement Framework SBC Equality and Diversity Policy Housemark STAR guidance Local Government Association (LGA) guidance on benchmarking resident satisfaction data.</p> <p><u>General Comments:</u></p> <p><u>Resident/STAR survey responses:</u></p> <p>In conducting the surveys, the views of random samples of resident householders and tenants are canvassed. In 2017/18, the surveys resulted in the following number of responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident survey – 1067 (margin of error in results = +/- 3%) • General Needs tenants – 483 (margin of error in results = +/- 4%) • Sheltered tenants – 367 (margin of error in results = +/- 3.75) <p>Returned samples are checked for differential response rates and results are weighted to correct for this, so that the reported results are broadly representative of the population of residents and tenants.</p> <p>The number of responses achieved in 2017/18 met good practice standards and benchmarking requirements. Every effort will be made to achieve the same level of responses from residents and general needs tenants in 2021/22 through the combined survey, if the budget allows. It is unlikely that the same level of sheltered tenant responses can be achieved as in 2017/18 however. It should be noted that the combined total number people surveyed will be lower than in 2017/18, and the</p> | <p>Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify</p> | <p>Detailed information on the size of sample/ breadth of survey questions that can be achieved within the revised budget.</p> |
|---|--|---|--|

range of issues consulted upon will be reduced (however, see comments below on addressing this and enhancing the approach through the use of other engagement channels).

Anonymised information on the protected characteristics of respondents is collected through the survey in respect of sex, age, ethnic origin, disability and working status. This enables some analysis of the profile of tenants and residents to be undertaken and enables significant differences in responses to be identified. It should be noted that all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant, particularly where the numbers within a particular protected characteristic group are relatively small.

SBC Community Engagement Framework

The Resident and STAR surveys are just one part of a broader approach to community engagement in Stevenage, which involves a range of ways in which the council consults with and involves residents and tenants. The Community Engagement Framework includes the following aim (which aligns with Goal 3 of the Equality & Diversity Policy):

- Providing and developing creative ways to engage with our communities, ensuring equality of opportunity in having a voice, which will be achieved by:
 - Promoting and supporting processes that engage and provide representation for communities in decision making
 - Developing more creative approaches that encourage engagement from all sections of our community, using digital and neighbourhood networks
 - Providing opportunities for our protected characteristic communities to come together in exploring the needs of minority communities, groups and organisations.

In this context, in 2021/22, a co-ordinated approach will be adopted, in

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| | <p>which the Resident/STAR survey will be complemented by other engagement activities at the Cooperative Neighbourhood level. This is a positive step that will enable us to reach new people in different ways, including those from protected characteristic groups.</p> | | |
|--|--|--|--|

| Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is: | | | |
|---|---|------|---|
| Age | <p>General (potential neutral impact) In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and general needs tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18 within the revised budget, views of differing ages can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p> <p>Older People (potential negative impact) It will not be possible within a combined, shorter survey to ask the specific additional questions to Independent Living Scheme tenants that were asked in the STAR 2017/18 and the number of responses from these tenants will be lower. This may be mitigated through a separate engagement activity, but this will require internal resource.</p> <p>Younger People (potential positive impact) As the Resident Survey is targeted at householders, the profile of respondents is inherently older than the general resident population. By undertaking other engagement</p> | Race | <p>Potential Positive Impact In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of residents and tenants from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined survey, to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p> <p>However, the Resident/STAR survey has limitations in this regard, given the generalised nature of the survey and the relatively small number of responses that can be achieved through the sample from people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>By undertaking more focused engagement activity with the diverse range of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in Stevenage, their views and feedback can be better captured.</p> |

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| | activity specifically targeted at younger people, the views of this group will be better captured. | | |
| Disability | <p>Potential Positive Impact In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of residents and tenants with disabilities can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined survey, to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p> <p>In addition, by undertaking complementary engagement activity specifically targeted at people with disabilities, more focused consultation with this group can be achieved.</p> | Religion or belief | <p>Potential Positive Impact Previous Resident and STAR surveys have not analysed results by respondents' religion or belief and because of the general nature of the surveys and the sampling approach, it is unlikely they would be particularly effective in this regard.</p> <p>By undertaking more focused engagement activity with faith groups the views of people of different religion or beliefs can be better captured.</p> |
| Gender reassignment | <p>Potential Positive Impact Previous Resident and STAR surveys have not analysed results by this protected characteristic and because of the general nature of the surveys and the sampling approach, it is unlikely they would be effective in this regard.</p> <p>There is the potential to undertake more focused engagement activity to capture the views of this protected characteristic group.</p> | Sex | <p>Potential Neutral Impact In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of male and female respondents can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy.</p> |
| Marriage or civil partnership | <p>Neutral Impact: In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of people of</p> | Sexual orientation | <p>Potential Positive Impact: The previous Resident and STAR surveys did not analyse results in relation to this protected characteristic and more focused engagement</p> |

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| | different marital status can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy. | | activity may enable views to be better captured. |
| Pregnancy & maternity | Neutral Impact: The Resident and STAR surveys do not analyse results in relation to this protected characteristic. | Socio-economic ⁶ | Potential Neutral Impact: In general terms, if the same number of responses from residents and tenants can be achieved as in 2017/18, views of respondents from differing socio-economic backgrounds can continue to be canvassed and compared through the combined Resident/STAR survey to the same level of statistical accuracy. |
| Other | | | |

| Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| Remove discrimination & harassment | By widening the range of engagement activities, the council can better understand whether perceptions of the town and the experience of council services differ amongst people from protected | Promote equal opportunities | The proposed approach to widen the range of engagement activities will increase opportunities for people from protected characteristic groups to express their views on issues and services and better | Encourage good relations | |

⁶Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

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| | characteristic groups compared to the wider population | | inform council decisions | | |
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What further work / activity is needed as a result of this assessment?

| Action | Responsible officer | How will this be delivered and monitored? | Deadline |
|--|---|---|---------------|
| Establish the revised Resident/STAR survey sampling/questionnaire approach | Corporate Policy & Business Support Manager | C&N Service Plan | February 2021 |
| Develop an engagement plan incorporating both the Resident/STAR survey and other engagement activities | Community Development Manager | C&N Service Plan | February 2021 |

Approved by Assistant Director/ Strategic Director: Rob Gregory
Date: 16/11/20

Full Equality Impact Assessment

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

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|---|---------------------|
| What is being assessed? | | HRA: Rent and Service Charge 2021/22 | |
| Lead Assessor | Jaine Cresser | | Assessment team |
| Start date | December 2020 | End date | Jan 2022 |
| When will the EqIA be reviewed? | Jan 2022 | | Elizabeth Ddamulira |

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| Who may be affected by it? | All tenants |
| What are the key aims of it? | <p>To increase the rent on dwellings from week commencing 5 April 2021 by 1.5%, which is an average increase of £1.46 for social rents, £2.38 for affordable rents and £1.80 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52 week year). This has been calculated using the rent formula CPI +1% in line with government policy and the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy.</p> <p>The Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy provides a framework for setting our rents and service charges within legislative requirements. The rent and service charge income underpins the delivery of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan's key housing objectives to deliver effective services, to invest in its properties to ensure homes are of a modern standard and to provide new social housing to rent. The policy was revised in December 2019.</p> <p>The revisions aimed to ensure that the policy complied with the government's direction on the Rent Standard 2019 and to clarify the Council's position in relation to service charge increases and affordable rents. A further aim this year is to mitigate the impact of COVID 19 on our customers and their ability to pay rent and service charges. Key elements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase rents on social rent and affordable rent properties by up to CPI+1% each year from 2020, for a period of at least five years. |

| | |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the rents for all excluded properties by CPI +1%, e.g. LSSO • Set the rent for a proportion of new build homes at affordable rents. • Set the rent where adaptations or extensions have resulted in the property being increased in size (for example, an additional bedroom), in accordance with the formula rent as detailed in the policy. • Further to the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, charge the rent payable by new tenants of existing social rent housing at the higher of the formula rent (i.e. the 'social rent rate'), or the actual rent (i.e. the 'assumed rent rate') as at 8th July 2015, with the appropriate rent increase applied in line with the current Rent Standard Direction (February 2019). • Charge actual costs for service charges but with the provision to apply a cap, subject to any legal constraints, on affordability grounds where appropriate. • Mitigation of COVID19 impact |
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| What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|--|
| Remove discrimination & harassment | | Promote equal opportunities | The aim of the Rent & Service Charge Policy is to provide a fair method of calculating rents and service charges for all of our tenants. It also aligns with the council's Concessions for Fees and Charges Policy, and the principle of recovering the cost of providing services. | Encourage good relations | |

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| What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing, February 2019 • Direction on the Rent Standard, 2019 • Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 • Housing and Planning Act 2016 • Rent and service charge policy agreed by Exec December 2019 and recommended to Council in January 2020 |
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|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent account information • Housing System data • Specialist Support service data |
| <p>In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?</p> | <p>Approval to increase rents by CPI + 1% for 5 years from 2020/21 required a revision of HRA Budget plans priorities. The HRA Business Plan was agreed at the December 2019 Executive Meeting.</p> <p>The average rent increase for 2021/2022 is (Adjusted Limited Basic 2020) + 1.5% (General stock) and + 1.5% (LSSO stock).</p> <p>When calculating rents and service charges accounts, consideration will be taken of the need to balance any increase in the combined rent and service charge with the potential financial impact on customers. This relates to 37% of homes to which a service charge applies, which are predominantly flats as well as flexicare/independent living accommodation. The Council must recover the actual cost of providing the service and service charge costs will increase with inflationary pressures and changes in usage.</p> <p>The impact of the 2021/22 rent increase and service charges is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 306 homes or 4% receive a rent and service charge reduction; • 7,578 homes or 96% of households will receive a weekly rent and service charge increase of less than £3.50 (based on 52 weeks). • There are only 5 properties with an increase of more than £5.00. <p>We had 6,799 general social rented properties, 36 affordable rent properties, 832 flexicare and independent living accommodation and 85 LSSOs as at November 2020. The setting of a proportion of new build lets at affordable rents will contribute positively to increasing the supply of new homes in Stevenage. All target groups will benefit given the need for affordable housing is common across all socio-economic and minority groups. The current low supply of new affordable housing and the high cost of the private rented sector in Stevenage have impacted adversely on those groups whose</p> |

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| | <p>incomes are average or below average.</p> <p>This also further supports work with people who need help to live independently at home and those at risk of homelessness, through wider housing options, continued provision of support, and financial assistance for adaptations and more homelessness preventative programmes respectively.</p> <p>Any groups that are potentially disadvantaged are still expected to be able to benefit from a council property set at a social rent.</p> <p>Tenants benefited from four years of rent reduction from 2016-2020 so the impact of the rent increase is mitigated partially by having to use a lower base than it would have been had there not been a mandatory rent reduction (cumulative) of 1 % for the four year period.</p> |
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Evidence and impact assessment

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

| Age | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|-----------------|--|----------------|---|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | | Unequal impact | <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups. A proportion of tenants may see an increase in service charges in any given year. The majority of tenants who are charged for services live in flats and/or flexicare/independent living accommodation.</p> <p>Tenants living in flexicare/independent living housing do so because they have additional needs that require support relating to age, disability or both. The minimum age for entry into flexicare/independent living housing is 55 years and data from Northgate indicates that the proportion of tenants aged 60+ in flexicare/independent living housing, is almost three</p> |

| | | | | <p>times the proportion for all tenant housing.</p> <p>People living in independent living/flexicare schemes who also pay for the support/emergency response services (that are not eligible for Housing benefit) on top of rent and service charges, may see an increase in the overall payment due each week.</p> <p>In relation to flat blocks, the data indicates that there is a higher proportion of people aged 18-29 years in flat blocks compared with all SBC housing.</p> <p>The below table illustrates the age groups that have been affected by Covid19 in terms of their employment since April 2020.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age</th> <th>19 and under</th> <th>20-29</th> <th>30-39</th> <th>40-49</th> <th>50-59</th> <th>60+</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Furlough</td> <td>0</td> <td>26</td> <td>76</td> <td>55</td> <td>54</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Retention</td> <td>0</td> <td>4</td> <td>30</td> <td>20</td> <td>18</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Redundancy</td> <td>0</td> <td>2</td> <td>6</td> <td>7</td> <td>9</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Age | 19 and under | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ | Furlough | 0 | 26 | 76 | 55 | 54 | 28 | Retention | 0 | 4 | 30 | 20 | 18 | 5 | Redundancy | 0 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 4 |
|--|--|-------|------------------------------------|---|-------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|----------|---|----|----|----|----|----|-----------|---|---|----|----|----|---|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 19 and under | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Furlough | 0 | 26 | 76 | 55 | 54 | 28 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retention | 0 | 4 | 30 | 20 | 18 | 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Redundancy | 0 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | See section above on data sources. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact? | Ongoing consultation will take place with residents in 2021/22 to establish the impact of the rent & service charge increase. Please also refer to the mitigations outlined in the socio-economic section below, most of which will also apply to this protected characteristic group. | | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Disability | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|-----------------|--|----------------|--|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | | Unequal impact | The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups. Northgate data on tenants in relation to disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. This information |

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| | | | | | <p>was also disclosed at the tenants' discretion so some tenants may not have provided it. To give some context, the data indicates that the proportion of tenants in flexicare/independent living housing declaring that they had a disability was almost double the proportion for the whole SBC tenant population.</p> <p>The proportion of tenants living in flat blocks declaring a disability was very similar to the proportion living in all properties; therefore a disproportionate impact on these tenants is not anticipated.</p> |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | | See section above on data sources. | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Gender reassignment, Marriage or civil partnership, Pregnancy & maternity, Race, Religion or belief, Sex, Sexual orientation N/A | | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------|--|---|--|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | | Unequal impact | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Socio-economic⁷ | | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------|--|----------------|--|
| e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users | | | | | |
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | The rent increase will be applied across all tenancies prescribed by the Work and Welfare Reform Act and in line with the current Rent | Unequal impact | |

⁷Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

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| | | | <p>Standard Direction (February 2019) regardless of circumstances. This will be applied for at least the next 4 years. Those reliant on Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit (UC) Housing costs to cover their full rent and eligible service charges won't be affected by the increase in rent and service charges as their benefit award will be recalculated.</p> <p>The number of bids on the new build properties let at affordable rents are similar to the number received for new build let at social rents. There is a mixture of employed and unemployed applicants. Applicants in receipt of benefits are not excluded or unfairly treated.</p> <p>Those who receive services for which a service charge is made will be charged the actual cost of those services. Heating charges are exempt from HB and tenants are expected to pay this. Water charges are also exempt from HB and are set by the Water Authority. SBC collects the water charges on behalf of the Water Authority.</p> <p>The COVID19 pandemic has caused unemployment and unstable employment. So for example we have 249 residents as at 16 December 2020 who are furloughed, on job retention or have been made redundant.</p> <p>Residents experiencing exceptional economic hardship who are unable to work due to a duty</p> | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|

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|--|--|---|--|--|
| | | to self-isolate are receiving a drop in earnings. | | |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | See section above on data sources | | |
| <p>What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact and promote equality and inclusion?</p> | <p>The policy allows for capping of service charges, subject to any legal constraints. As a means of mitigating the impact of an increase that would cause hardship, the council may subsidise the costs.</p> <p>Rent increase information will be published on our website early February 2021 to start preparing tenants.</p> <p>The rent notification letter (to be sent out at the end of February) will offer tenants the opportunity to discuss any queries they have with staff. It will explain why the rent has increased and also explain any increase in service charges. Where a property has a number of service charges they will be fully explained, with a summary of how the weekly charge has increased overall.</p> <p>Where support charges are also included (mainly but not exclusively for independent living and flexi care schemes) separate notifications will be sent out to these residents to ensure it is clearly set out how each element of the weekly charge is made up.</p> <p>To ensure that this is explained as clearly as possible there will be a FAQ sheet and details on the website and hard copies available for those who need them.</p> <p>The policy states that the Council will have regard to the Local Housing Allowance when setting affordable rents. If affordable rents are set at this level, HB/ UC housing cost will cover the rent in full for those tenants who are entitled to the maximum amount of housing benefit. Setting at the Local Housing Allowance will also benefit tenants who are, for example on a low wage or zero hour contracts and where partial housing benefit can be paid.</p> <p>For those moving into Affordable Rent (AR) properties a comprehensive</p> | <p>What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p> | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | <p>affordability assessment is carried out prior to offer to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</p> <p>The implementation of the policy in respect of AR will be kept under review by the Housing Development Executive Committee and should adverse impacts be identified this will inform future decision making in this regard.</p> <p>Support provision for this group has been increased as part of an income recovery action plan, to ensure that tenants can pay through sustainable arrangements to maintain payments towards rent and service charges. Additional staffing resources have been secured to continue work to target and support UC cases to maximise income collection and minimise the level of arrears for this group of tenants.</p> <p>We will make links to clear support and guidance on all of our communication platforms.</p> <p>We will prepare staff to enable them to respond effectively and empathetically with tenants.</p> | | |
|--|--|--|--|

| Other | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------|--|--|
| please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts | | | | |
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | | |
| What opportunities are there to mitigate the impact? | | | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) |

What are the findings of any consultation with:

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------|--|
| Residents? | Planned consultation with residents during 2020/21 regarding the impact of the new rent policy was postponed to 2021/22 due to COVID19. This will be the second year of increase since the rent reduction regime was introduced and consultation will enable us to establish the impact and put in place systems to mitigate this accordingly. | Staff? | |
| Voluntary & community sector? | | Partners? | |
| Other stakeholders? | <p>Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) was consulted in November 2019 and was supportive of the policy to charge service charges at actual costs but with the provision in the policy to cap any increases if this would cause hardship.</p> <p>In terms of affordable rents, HMAB broadly supported this policy. There are still some concerns about the affordability of such schemes and the position if tenants lost employment/were on a low wage. The rent would be covered in full for those tenants entitled to full HB/UC housing costs due to the rent being set at the LHA level. Also those in low paid employment may be entitled to partial HB/ UC housing costs. Thorough affordability assessments will be carried out.</p> | | |

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Overall conclusion & future activity

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| Explain the overall findings of the assessment and reasons for outcome (please choose one): | | |
| 1. No inequality, inclusion issues or opportunities to further improve have been identified | | |
| Negative / unequal impact, barriers to inclusion or improvement opportunities identified | 2a. Adjustments made | |
| | 2b. Continue as planned | <p>The future viability of the HRA Business Plan will be reliant upon us being able to recover the costs of service provision where it's possible to do so.</p> <p>Only a proportion of new builds will be at affordable rent in line with the</p> |

| | | |
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| | | <p>revised HRA Budget plan. The proposal to offer a mix of new build rents at affordable rent levels and at social rent levels would result in additional income to the HRA over 30 years which makes a significant contribution to the sustainability of the plan and the Council's ability to build new homes and to deliver other housing priorities.</p> <p>There are plans to build 240 social rented and 270 affordable rented houses over the first 5 years of the revised Business Plan. The policy and the aim is for a 50/50 split, but due to the timing of delivery on schemes the weighting is slightly biased towards affordable, but it evens out over the whole 30 year plan. So far 243 new builds have been delivered by the Council and 295 are under construction.</p> <p>This means that there will be a total of approximately 4% of council homes at affordable rent at the end of the 5 year period. The majority of annual lettings (i.e. of new build and re-let properties) would continue to be at a social rent level and it is estimated that after 30 years the vast majority of council property rents (an estimated 88%) will be set at the social rent rate, subject to any changes in legislation or Government guidance.</p> |
| | 2c. Stop and remove | |

| Detail the actions that are needed as a result of this assessment and how they will help to remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities and / or encourage good relations : | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------|------------|--|
| Action | Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage? | Responsible officer | Deadline | How will this be embedded as business as usual? |
| Consultation with residents to establish the impact of the rent increase | Remove discrimination and promote equal opportunities | Elizabeth Ddamulira | March 2022 | Systems will be put in place to mitigate impacts |

Approved by Assistant Director (Housing and Investment): Jaine Cresser

Date: 16 December 2020

Full Equality Impact Assessment

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

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| What is being assessed? | | Support Charge increase by £2 from £6 to £8 | | | |
| Lead Assessor | Kelly Holland | | | Assessment team | Kelly Holland Karen Long |
| Start date | 10 November 2020 | End date | 9 November 2021 | | |
| When will the EqIA be reviewed? | 8 November 2021 | | | | |

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|------------------------------|--|
| Who may be affected by it? | Residents living in independent living/flexicare housing that are in receipt of housing benefit, fairer charging, universal credit (UC) or 2003 protected (i.e. those in the service prior to the government supporting people grant funding starting in 2003). As at 20 November 2020 this affects 595 people. The remaining residents in independent living/flexicare already pay the full charge. |
| What are the key aims of it? | To contribute to the recovery of costs for providing the support/emergency response service to people living in independent living/flexicare schemes that historically have not had to pay anything towards the cost as we received housing related support funding from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). The support/alarm service is not eligible for housing benefit, but in order to be able to continue this service to residents we needed to introduce the initial weekly contribution of £2.00 in 2018/19, £4 in 2019/20, £6 in 2020/21 and propose to increase this to £8.00 in 2021/22. The total cost of the support/alarm service will be £19.65 per week so Stevenage Borough Council will still be subsidising £11.65 per week. This option has the support of the housing portfolio holder. |

| What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to: | | | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| Remove discrimination & harassment | This will remove discrimination against other residents that pay the full cost for not being in receipt of housing benefit or fairer charging. | Promote equal opportunities | This also aligns to the Council's aim to be financially sufficient and recover costs of services where possible. | Encourage good relations | |

| | |
|---|---|
| What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data of those on full/partial housing, fairer charging, universal credit or those that are protected due to supporting people implementation in 2003. • Age profile of independent/flexicare housing tenants |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|---|
| In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make? | We currently have 3 people that have made nil payment of the support charge either since the introduction of the contribution charge or from moving in. The majority of people do not pay through direct debit and pay through a payment card. This is not always a regular payment and historically it took a lot of effort by the Support Services team to get people to pay £6. As at 20 November 2020 we have 71 people who are in arrears over £30 totalling £12,384. This is likely to increase especially when the new charge starts in April 2021. Following the housing and investment business unit review the management of the support charge income has transferred to Income Services in line with other income collection functions. |
|--|---|

Evidence and impact assessment

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

Age

Negative impact

The residents that are charged a support charge are predominantly older and disabled people as this accommodation is for people over 55 years old or for people with a disability.

Conversely however, the costs are currently subsidised by the wider tenant population, who have a younger age profile and do not benefit from the service.

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment

Age profile of independent/flexicare housing residents

What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?

What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)

Disability

e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness

Unequal impact

The residents that are charged a support charge are predominantly older and disabled people as this accommodation is for people over 55 years old or for people with a disability.

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment

Northgate report on disability profile for independent/flexicare residents and also whole population living in SBC properties.

What opportunities are

What do you still need

Northgate data on tenants relating to

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>there to promote equality and inclusion?</p> | | <p>to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p> | <p>tenants with disability was collected a number of years ago and is not up to date. This information was also disclosed at the tenant's discretion so some tenants may not have provided it. We have introduced a support services module on Northgate whereby we will be able to collate more data on disability and this will inform future EQIAs. Northgate are in the process of getting the reports set up so we are able to extract this information in the future.</p> |
|---|--|--|---|

| <p>Gender reassignment N/A</p> | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------|
| <p>Positive impact</p> | | <p>Negative impact</p> | <p>Unequal impact</p> |
| <p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p> | | | |
| <p>What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?</p> | | <p>What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p> | |

| <p>Marriage or civil partnership N/A</p> | | | |
|---|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| <p>Positive impact</p> | | <p>Negative impact</p> | <p>Unequal impact</p> |
| <p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p> | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |
|---|--|--|--|

| Pregnancy & maternity – N/A | | | |
|--|--|--|----------------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Race – N/A | | | |
|--|--|--|----------------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Religion or belief – N/A | | | |
|---|--|-----------------|----------------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| assessment | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Sex – N/A | | | |
|--|--|--|----------------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

| Sexual orientation – N/A e.g. straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual | | | |
|--|--|--|----------------|
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |

Socio-economic⁸

e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement

Positive Impact:

Results from the STAR survey in 2018 have shown that residents identified the emergency alarm service and the supported housing officer as the 2nd and 3rd most important priority associated with living in their property. The application of the support charge will help to ensure that the Council can continue to deliver this service.

In January 2018 we held drop in sessions at each scheme for residents to come and discuss the charge and for us to explain what it is for. We had a lot of positive comments with the majority understanding the need to pay towards the service. Some residents recognised that housing associations had withdrawn the emergency service and scheme manager and didn't want this to happen to them. One person wanted to pay more.

HCC have confirmed that they will be continuing with our flexicare support contract until end March 2022 which will mean that this will help offset some of the costs that we would have had to pass on to this group of residents.

Negative Impact:

The support charge is not eligible for housing benefit and could have a negative impact for those on lower incomes in terms of affordability. However, of 103 residents where we had to chase payment following 2018's introduction of the £2 weekly contribution only one resident said they couldn't afford it and was referred to the welfare benefit and debt advisors. We have not had any indication to suggest that residents can't afford the current charge. If anyone is struggling with money we will refer them to the welfare benefit and debt advisors for support.

This group of residents may also be affected by increases in Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) affecting the overall amount that older and disabled people can afford to pay. (We have not had notification of what the charges will be for 2021/22):

- HCC charge for some of their community based adult social care services that they used to provide for free. This has

⁸Although non-statutory, the Council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

impacted on many people over 60 in the independent living/flexicare schemes as they are in receipt of some care due to their age/medical conditions. The low care band in flexicare doubled in 2018 and this had an impact on residents being able to afford care and HCC had received a number of complaints.

However, the introduction of the charge is considered to be fairer than current arrangements, whereby support charge costs are subsidised by the wider tenant population who do not benefit from the service.

Furthermore, the charge has been introduced on an incremental basis, to mitigate the impact, rather than applying the full amount of £19.65 per week in one 'hit'.

During 2021/22, officers will also review whether any elements of the independent living service should in fact be eligible for housing benefit. This will be reflected in the charges from April 2022 due to the fees and charges timeline.

Communication

The support charge notification letter will go out in February 2021 to all residents living in independent living and flexicare properties.

To ensure that this is explained as clearly as possible there will be a FAQ sheet and details on the website.

HMAB will agree and /or make recommendations for the content of the letters in January 2021, with the portfolio holder signing off the final letters.

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment

- Comments from drop in sessions held in January 2018.
- A copy of charges for community based care from HCC in 2018
- Spreadsheet detailing those who hadn't paid any weekly contribution since the introduction of the charge or since they moved in.

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | We have clearly explained what the support charge covers and the reasons for charging The notification letters will offer customers the opportunity to discuss their concerns with staff and get support in applying for any relevant benefits. | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | |
|---|--|--|--|

| Other – N/A | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|----------------|
| please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts | | | | |
| Positive impact | | Negative impact | | Unequal impact |
| Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment | | | | |
| What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion? | | What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page) | | |

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What are the findings of any consultation with:

| | | | |
|--------|------|------------|--|
| Staff? | None | Residents? | Results from the STAR survey in 2018 have shown that residents identified the emergency alarm service and the support housing officer as the 2 nd and 3 rd most important priority associated with living in their property. In January 2018 we held drop in sessions at each scheme for residents to come and discuss the charge and for us to explain |
|--------|------|------------|--|

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------|--|
| | | | what it is for. We had a lot of positive comments with the majority understanding the need to pay towards the service. Some residents recognised that housing associations had withdrawn the emergency service and scheme manager and didn't want it to happen to them. One person wanted to pay more. |
| Voluntary & community sector? | | Partners? | |
| Other stakeholders? | | | |

Overall conclusion & future activity

| Explain the overall findings of the assessment and reasons for outcome (please choose one) : | | |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| 1. No inequality, inclusion issues or opportunities to further improve have been identified | | |
| Negative / unequal impact, barriers to inclusion or improvement opportunities identified | 2a. Adjustments made | |
| | 2b. Continue as planned | The future viability of the support and alarm service in independent/flexicare living is reliant upon us being able to recover the cost of service provision where it is possible to do so. Results from the STAR survey support the value of the service from residents by them rating the emergency alarm and supported housing officer as their 2 nd and 3 rd priority (behind the repairs to their property). |
| | 2c. Stop and remove | |

| Detail the actions that are needed as a result of this assessment and how they will help to remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities and / or encourage good relations : | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------|-----------|---|
| Action | Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage? | Responsible officer | Deadline | How will this be embedded as business as usual? |
| Review whether any elements of the independent living service should be eligible for housing benefit | This is to ensure fair charging of service. | Karen Long | June 2021 | |

Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Jaine Cresser Assistant Director (Housing and Investment)
Date: 18/12/20

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