

Public Document Pack

Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

13 July 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council will be held in the Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage on Wednesday, 21 July 2021 at 7.15pm and you are summoned to attend to transact the following business.

Yours faithfully

Matthew Partridge
Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

To receive any communications that the Mayor may wish to put before Council.

3. MAIN DEBATE

There is no Main Debate.

4. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

5. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A written answer to this question will be published on a supplementary agenda.

(A) Question from Mr Jim Borchers

"I was a member of the Stevenage Citizens Panel on Climate Change that met over 4 sessions from 26th to 29th October 2020.

At the end of the process we requested that we be fully involved in future activities on Climate Change and be informed by Stevenage Borough Council on

their progress towards introducing policies to address Climate Change.

We were asked if we wanted to join a WhatsApp group.

We were informed that there would be some information forthcoming in January 2021.

To date I have heard nothing.

It is also worth noting that the current website is still advising “**we will also be establishing a citizen’s panel made up of a select group of Stevenage residents**” with no recognition that this has already taken place.

It is now over two years since this Council declared a Climate Emergency, and it is over 8 months since the Citizens Panel met.

Please can the citizens of Stevenage have an update on the priorities that the Citizens Panel voted to be taken forwards and what progress has been made towards putting them into action?”

7. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

In accordance with the Council’s Standing Orders, the Leader of the Opposition shall be given the opportunity to raise one matter relevant to the Borough that has arisen since the last meeting of the Council. The Leader of the Council shall then have the opportunity to advise the Council of matters relevant to the Borough that have arisen since the last meeting.

8. UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

To receive updates from the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees on the recent activities of those Committees.

9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(i) Town and Country Planning

To consider the following motion submitted by the Labour Group:

In the Queen’s Speech on 11th May 2021, the Conservative Government announced sweeping changes to the planning system that it is now clear to see amount to a ‘Developer’s Charter’. This plan to introduce legislation to ‘zone’ areas for development and then allow developers a free rein with no further democratic planning process, is a recipe for untrammelled and inappropriate development in every town and community. No-one here would argue that there is not a case for reform in the planning system, but these proposed reforms are taking planning absolutely in the wrong direction, away from the communities they affect.

Our Council has a very deep commitment to delivering the homes that people need, so we do not bring this motion forward as ‘nimbys’ who want no development at all. But we believe that our new town principles should continue to be upheld, we believe in homes being built alongside the infrastructure to support them and with the creation of sustainable communities at the heart of the

planning system.

Under these new proposals planning decisions will be taken away from democratically elected local councils and handed to development boards appointed by Ministers in Whitehall. It is these new quangos that will decide where the 'zones' for development are located, with little local knowledge or input from local people. Residents living in areas zoned for growth will find they no longer have an automatic right to object to individual planning applications on their own doorsteps, no right to object to inappropriate development on green space and no right to object to development that over-burdens local infrastructure like roads, doctors' surgeries, schools, health facilities or public transport.

Plans to extend the permitted development regime are also of great concern to us in Stevenage as they too, see development taking place with no local democratic and community input and this regime does not require developers to contribute to infrastructure or affordable housing. In Vista Tower where we see leaseholders facing huge and unaffordable charges to remedy fire safety issues, we see the worst of this permitted development regime.

So we bring forward the following resolution to urgently address the concerns we have relating to the Government's proposals:

"That this Council believes that planning works best when the local community, councillors and developers work together to shape local areas and deliver the new homes that are necessary and therefore calls on the government to protect the right of communities to object to individual planning applications. We demand that the Secretary of State urgently re-thinks these ill-conceived planning reforms.

Council requires that our Executive Member for Environment and Regeneration write to the Secretary of State setting out our concerns about all local democratic input being stripped from the planning system.

Council also pledges to lobby the Government to reconsider the extension to the permitted development regime. Every local development should have the benefit of community input and for both objectors and supporters to be able to express their view to decision-makers in public through the democratic process."

(ii) Electric Bus Link

To consider the following motion submitted by the Labour Group:

Since 2009, this Council has had an ambition to provide a rapid electric bus link to all of the areas that comprise Central Stevenage; High Street, Town Centre, Leisure Park and Roaring Meg. It was envisaged that this should be a hop-on/hop-off service, running frequently round the loop and with a low fixed-fee fare for each journey. It could also serve a park and ride facility at Fairlands Valley Showground and may be suitable for a further extension to Gunnelwood Road to provide those working there with a fast and easy link from central Stevenage and the bus and train stations to their place of work.

Successive attempts to carry out feasibility studies on this project have failed or, in one case, only resulted in a traditional and non-sustainable form of bus service being outlined which proved not to meet the commercial barriers set by operators

and could not deliver the improvement in carbon output that a fully sustainable service would be designed to do.

“That Council asks that every effort now be made to carry out a feasibility study on this rapid electric bus link initiative complete with costings. This work should explore the possibility of delivering this service with partners, the highway authority (Hertfordshire County Council), the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Town Development Board and Hertfordshire Growth Board and explore all options for funding the project including use of grants, government initiatives, community infrastructure levy and section 106 funding and specific funds for sustainable transport initiatives.

That a report be brought before the Council’s Executive setting out the options as quickly as possible and no later than the first quarter of 2022.”

(iii) Supporting tougher action on pet thefts

To consider the following motion submitted by Councillor Alex Farquharson and seconded by Councillor Jody Hanafin.

Theft of pets has been on the rise both locally and nationally. Pets are a key part of many families here in Stevenage, and the emotional damage caused by the theft of pets is often as painful as the loss of a loved one.

While the Council's formal role in dealing with this issue is very limited, there are some gestures this authority can make to help tackle pet theft.

“That this Council notes:

- Hertfordshire Constabulary data shows a 54% increase in dog thefts in the county during 2019/20 compared to the previous year.
- Data for England and Wales shows an 11% increase in dog thefts nationally during 2020/21 compared to the previous year.
- There are currently discussions in central government and parliament about increasing penalties for pet theft, which could potentially include custodial sentences.

That this Council resolves:

- To encourage residents to ensure their pets, especially cats and dogs, are microchipped and that their microchip information is up to date. This is the best precaution to hinder the sale of stolen pets as well as identifying them once recovered by police.
- To request that the Chief Executive of the Council writes to the Home Secretary to express this Council’s support for tougher pet theft penalties.
- To request that the Chief Executive of the Council writes to Stephen McPartland MP to thank him for signing a parliamentary amendment calling for tougher action on pet theft and to request that the MP continues pursuing this issue.”

10. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRS / PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Written answers to the following questions will be circulated on a supplementary agenda.

(A) Question from Councillor Margaret Notley

“I am fully aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused major financial problems for SLL, but why was careful financial monitoring not carried out to highlight problems earlier and will there be strict monitoring with any new contract, when the present one expires in 2023?”

(B) Question from Councillor Adam Mitchell CC

“Do you believe the Council has done enough to move towards paperless working?”

(C) Question from Councillor Nicholas Leech

“How would you describe your record on delivering more electric car charging devices?”

(D) Question from Councillor Wendy Kerby

“I would like to ask the following question with regard to the article in the Comet “*Council breaks safety laws in major refurb of flat blocks*” and the Council's subsequent response:

Have the Council reviewed the results of the contractor's internal investigation into this incident? What corrective action have they taken to mitigate the situation and what further action are they taking to prevent recurrence?”

(E) Question from Councillor Graham Lawrence CC

“Is the Council’s support for thousands of new flats in Stevenage appropriate and realistic for the Post-COVID world?”

(F) Question from Councillor Alex Farquharson

“Do you believe the current relationship between the Council and staff trade unions is appropriate and in the tax payers’ best interest?”

(G) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

“What is the Council doing to maintain our town’s cherished woodlands?”

(H) Question from Councillor Graham Snell

“Given that the proposed changes to Lytton Way will not take place for several years, what changes will be made to help passengers with mobility difficulties travel between the new Bus Station and the Train Station?”

11. OFFICER REPORT - COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

To consider and approve the Council's Community Safety Strategy 2021 – 2024.

Page Nos. 7 - 42

12. OFFICER REPORT - EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT

To consider and approve the proposed Employee Code of Conduct 2021.

Page Nos. 43 - 64

13. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

To consider the Annual Scrutiny Report 2020/21.

Page Nos. 65 - 72

14. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

To note the Minutes of the Audit Committee meetings held on 3 February 2021, 24 March 2021 and 8 June 2021.

Page Nos. 73 - 86

15. 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.

16. REPORT ON URGENT PART II DECISION MADE BY THE EXECUTIVE ON 9 JUNE 2021 - DANESTRETE ROUNDABOUT SITE DISPOSAL

To consider a report on an Urgent Part II decision made by the Executive at its meeting held on 9 June 2021 in respect of the Danestrete Roundabout Site Disposal.

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Meeting: COUNCIL
Portfolio Area: Community Safety
Date: 21 July 2021

COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

BUDGET & POLICY FRAMEWORK

Author – Sarah Pateman Ext. 2458
Lead Officers – Rob Gregory Ext. 2568
Contact Officer – Sarah Pateman Ext. 2458



1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the proposed Community Safety Strategy 2021-24, which outlines the emerging priorities of the SoSafe partnership for the next three years.
- 1.2 The Council's Constitution includes the Community Safety Strategy as a Budget and Policy Framework item and as such the draft document, post consideration by the Executive in February 2021, was reviewed by the subsequent Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Budget and Policy Framework requires the final report/strategy, incorporating comments made by that Committee, to be re-considered by the Executive and reviewed again by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This was undertaken during March 2021 and the Executive has agreed the document and recommended it to Council for approval.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the proposed final Community Safety Strategy (the Strategy), attached as Appendix A to this report, be approved, noting its focus on the work of the SoSafe partnership.

3. BACKGROUND

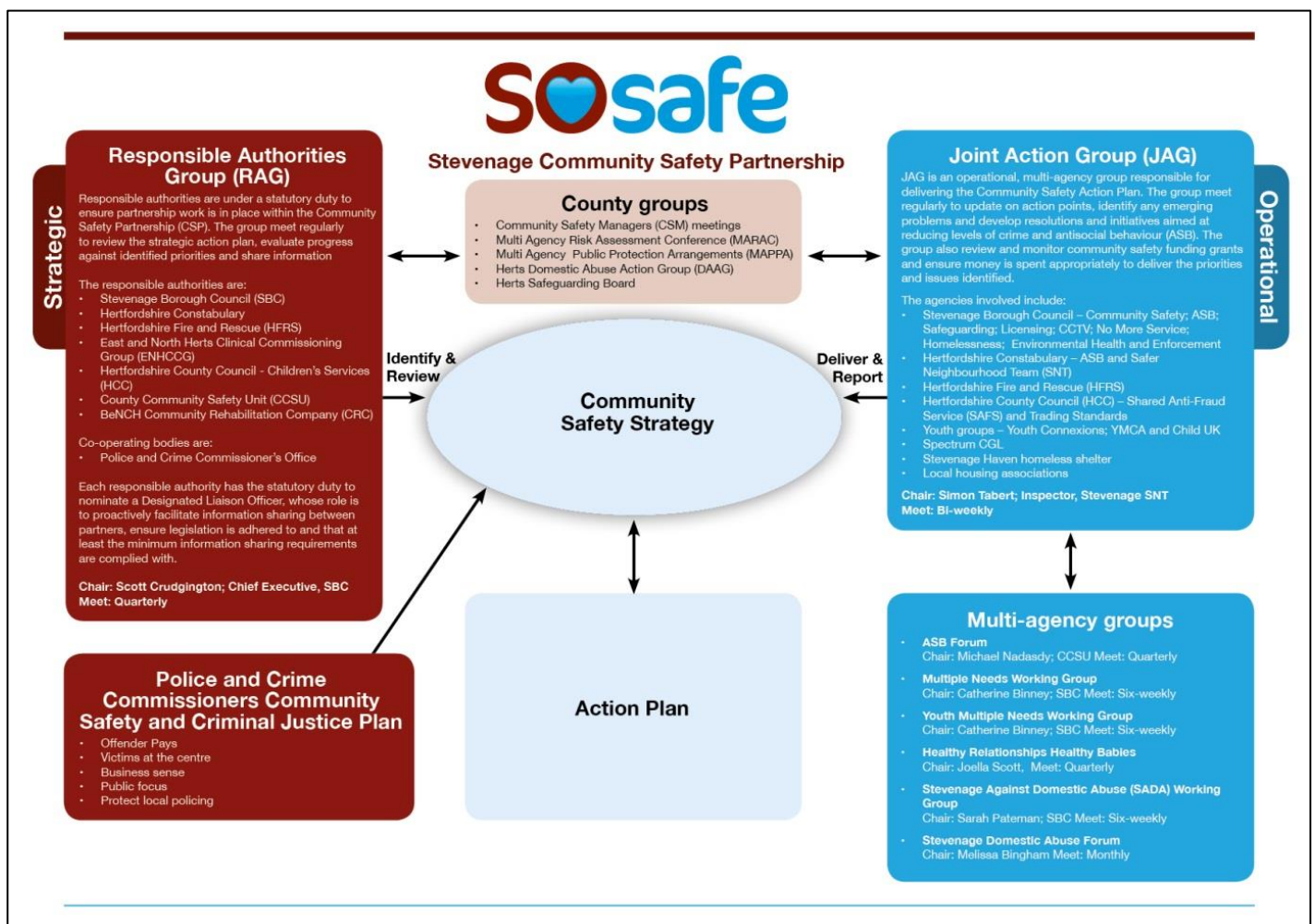
- 3.1 Stevenage is rapidly changing, with work having already commenced on the major town centre regeneration programme and new homes being built over the last three years, as more people choose to move to the town to live and work, along with new businesses that will help to grow our local economy. Stevenage is a safe place but like most towns there will always on occasions be peaks in crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), sometimes due to a spate of connected incidents. The Council is aware through the engagement that has taken place as part of the review of the SoSafe Strategy that some

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residents remain concerned regarding the use of drugs and how, in particular, this affects our young people. The Community Safety Partnership – SoSafe will continue to address these and other crimes/ASB related issues as and when they occur by working co-operatively with local communities.

The development of a strategy is central to the overall purpose of the Community Safety Partnership – SoSafe and is summarised in the diagram below.

3.2



This Strategy will ensure that SoSafe utilises its resources in the most effective manner possible to deliver meaningful crime reduction outcomes. SoSafe is committed to building on progress achieved in recent years, and will strive to continue to drive down crime and disorder in Stevenage. During the Covid-19 pandemic Partners have continued to work to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime. SoSafe has introduced initiatives that have supported the most vulnerable and those with complex needs by making best use of the partners' resources and targeting them effectively.

3.3 Between 2018 and 2021 SoSafe secured over £450,000 of external funding to help it deliver on priorities and initiatives. This funding resulted in the delivery of some innovative projects including the SOS (Morse code: Save our Souls) Youth worker with joint funding through the Police and Crime Commissioners

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Office, SADA (Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse) Move on Accommodation, the recruitment of Specialist Domestic Abuse Workers and the recruitment of a Complex Needs Advocate for the No More Service. Funding was also secured for the introduction of Operation Urban which tackles homelessness and aggressive street begging. Funding is time limited with concerns for continuing the SADA and No More Services post March 2022. We will continue to apply for external funding and will internally apply for a growth bid, but will also have to consider reducing the level of services that are offered.

- 3.4 SoSafe has worked collaboratively on a number of complex cases which have resulted in successful enforcement action being taken. This has included: re-possession of a property on the Absolute Ground for Possession, as well as a Property Closure on an address where drugs were being dealt which resulted in a high level of ASB for the residents. Further to this SoSafe secured an injunction concerning an individual following an arson threat, and the two year Injunction with a Power of Arrest banning car cruising and meeting in Stevenage following a serious accident in the town in July 2019.
- 3.5 Numerous partnership operations with the Police were undertaken such as: regular residents' surgeries in those tower blocks where there had been reports of anti-social behaviour and crime, and the quarterly Police Priority Setting meetings with Ward Councillors - which have helped to reassure residents and encourage them to report nuisance behaviour.
- 3.6 During the last three years the Partnership has engaged with residents on a number of occasions including the Domestic Abuse 16 Days of Action and Operation Night Owl (which targeted anti-social drinking and the night time economy) has been instrumental in arranging training for front line staff, partners and volunteers; including tackling extremism, Domestic Abuse Awareness, Hate Crime Awareness Training, Safeguarding and Modern Slavery Training.
- 3.7 SoSafe actively engages with the local community and involves them in the design of the future service offer. SoSafe has increased the profile of the Partnership and highlighted the benefits of co-operative working through the work of volunteers and partners and through mechanisms such as the SADA forum. It has also been possible to highlight what can be achieved when resources are co-ordinated and strategically aligned, in particular the outcomes achieved through SOS youth project, SADA and No More Service.
- 3.8 During September and October 2020, the SoSafe Partnership worked with local partners to shape the draft strategy. The themes for the strategy were further developed through engagement with residents and visitors to the town through a number of social media consultations, surveys with clients and data collected from the police Echo platform. Data from annual strategic assessments and information shared at both Partnership and client led meetings have been analysed and used in the development of the 2021/24 SoSafe Community Safety Strategy.

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- 3.9 There are a number of differences between the 2018/21 and 2021/24 Community Safety Strategies. The 2021/24 Strategy focuses on our work as a co-operative Council and the importance of working closely with the Community. This begins by asking members of our communities how they would like to be consulted and what their priorities are. The SoSafe Partners are aware that priorities do change over time. This happened significantly in 2020 during the pandemic, where our priorities changed to reflect what our communities were telling us. This included the nature and level of support for our most vulnerable residents; specifically, those suffering with their mental health and complex needs. Also additional support was provided for those who needed to flee their homes and had nowhere to go. The underlying principle of the Strategy is co-operation, empowering residents and other stakeholders to engage with the SoSafe partnership by getting involved in whatever way they can. The 2021/24 Strategy aims to continue the work of the flagship SADA service, which now runs across 5 other district council areas as well as Stevenage. The service will also continue to expand its remit to supporting others experiencing abuse and those affected by Modern Slavery who needs advice and support. Our Safeguarding team will work co-operatively with partners to talk to our communities about the effects of Hate Crime and how to get help, support and also how to report a crime.
- 3.10 The police have introduced a prevention model as part of their partnership working, the “Prevention First” model has been rolled out across the force and in being adopted by partners. SoSafe is already prevention focused and will continue to work in this way.
- 3.11 The proposed Strategy accompanies this report. It is suggested that, subject to Members approving the Strategy for implementation, it should be adopted by SoSafe on 26 July 2021.
- 3.12 There are a number of key points that require consideration. These are set out in the following sections of the report which set out the rationale upon which the recommendations are presented.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Local priorities for Stevenage

- 4.1.1 The draft Community Safety Strategy has been compiled based on evidence obtained from Police Performance Reports including strategic assessments, engagement with members of the public, partners and customers, surveys completed by service users and those affected any nuisance. The priorities identified are those that ranked highest, following the consultation and engagement.

For the period 2018-21 the identified priorities were:

1. Helping to make People feel Safe
2. Reduce crime and Disorder

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3. Protect and Safeguard Vulnerable People
4. Tackle antisocial behaviour (ASB) Co-operatively with partners
5. Break the cycle of substance misuse and offending

These priorities are underpinned by two overarching objectives to:

- Build Resilient Communities
- Work co-operatively with communities to help reduce fear of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

The five key priorities identified for 2021-2024 are:

1. Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB
2. Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery
3. Promote reporting of hate crime and further promote equality in the community
4. Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol
5. Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime

These priorities are underpinned by two overarching objectives to:

- Consult with the community and work co-operatively with partners and residents
- Promote reporting of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

4.2 Rationale for priorities

- 4.2.1 This strategy provides a framework for the activities and initiatives that the Partnership delivers to improve community safety and community confidence in the town. Following consultation with members of the public and partners, this strategy identifies the priorities that SoSafe will focus on over the next three years. Whilst some of the priorities remain the same as in previous years there is a broadening focus on tackling concerns around the misuse of drugs, supporting and diverting young people away from crime and encouraging the reporting of Hate Crime. The Council also remains committed to maintaining and developing a co-operative approach towards tackling of domestic abuse, modern slavery and safeguarding our most vulnerable. Working co-operatively with partners and our communities across the town remains the overarching theme across all objectives.
- 4.2.2 Alongside the Strategy, a detailed action plan is produced each year, which shows how SoSafe will achieve its aims and objectives. The action plan contains specific targets and is monitored, updated and reviewed regularly ahead of the SoSafe meeting.
- 4.2.3 As the Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme progresses there will be further opportunities to develop localised approaches to support delivery of the Community Safety Strategy at a neighbourhood level. For example it may be

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possible to deliver more targeted intervention in neighbourhood hot-spots, and/or to work with residents, businesses and partners to design-out crime in planned neighbourhood improvement works. There will also be further opportunities to develop interventions with local neighbourhood-based community and voluntary organisations.

4.2.4 The Community Safety Strategy has been developed with due regard to the following:

- Public engagement and consultation
- National developments and changes to legislation
- Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) plan *Everybody's Business*
- Annual Strategic Assessment for Stevenage 2016/17
- County Community Safety Unit (CCSU) Domestic Abuse Strategy and the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Strategy
- CCSU Drugs and Alcohol Strategy
- National Probation Service Reducing Offending Strategy
- Historical and current crime data
- Residents Survey

4.2.5 The Executive received an initial draft of the Strategy on 10th February. Comments included the need for road safety and speeding based on feedback from members of the public and Police Priority Setting meetings. There was also reference to the need to link work on Hate Crime with the recommendations of the Equalities Commission. The Executive supported an amendment of the additional words “further promote” to the third objective, “Promote reporting of hate crime and further promote equality in the community”. The Executive approved a final draft of the Strategy on 10th March 2021.

4.2.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the Executive report and draft Strategy on 17th February. The committee enquired as to the ownership of the countywide Hate Crime Strategy. It was confirmed that this was led by Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Borough Council would be partners in its delivery. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a final draft of the Strategy and associated Executive report on 17th March 2021.

4.3 Strategic fit and context

4.3.1 The profile of the SoSafe partnership is of growing importance and it is increasingly being called upon to share best practice and co-operative ways of working. The responsibility to make Stevenage a safe place to live, work and visit is paramount to all SoSafe partners. The strategy is a core component of the Council's Place of Choice, Future Town, Future Council Programme and is also fundamental to the Town's Covid-19 Recovery Plan and emerging Co-operative Neighbourhood arrangements.

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5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 The Council will utilise existing resources to support implementation of the strategy. This includes communications functions, continued investment in CCTV and the work of the SBC community safety team. There is also recognition that a number of existing activities that are having a positive impact are reliant on time-limited funding which includes external funding resources. Given the financial position of the Council, some of these functions will be unable to continue without joint investment from others responsible for ensuring community safety and wellbeing in the town. The Community Safety Strategy remains a partnership strategy for the town and the Council will continue to work with other commissioners and funders such as Hertfordshire County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Government Departments and other funders to help lever in investment wherever possible.
- 5.1.2 There may be some match-funding or pump priming requirements related to progressing certain initiatives and projects. The SoSafe partnership Action Plan is developed annually as part of the final strategy and will highlight where resources will be required to support delivery of specific projects, with a fundraising plan attached to each action.

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 Production of the strategy is a legal requirement of the community safety partnership. The Crime and Disorder Act 1988 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 1996) requires the responsible authorities for an area to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder (including anti-social behaviour adversely affecting the local environment); combatting the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances and for the education of re-offending in the area.

5.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.3.1 The Council is committed to providing high quality services that are relevant to the needs and responsive to the views of all sections of the local community, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation or marital status. The General Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the exercise of its functions.
- 5.3.2 There is recognition that crime and anti-social behaviour can disproportionately impact upon those with protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act. The emphasis on Hate Crime as part of the Strategy highlights the potential for this to happen at a local level. The partnership will be working with the community to encourage reporting of Hate Crime and further promote equalities across our communities. SoSafe will strive to involve the community in the design and delivery of the interventions which

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tackle crime and drive down disorder and anti-social behaviour. Relationships will continue to be built with groups around the town, including those from different faiths, BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups and the traveller community, LGBT communities, women, girls and older people. It will be essential to ensure interventions meet specific needs for different parts of the community and are delivered in a meaningful and empowering way. The SoSafe Partnership will work with the Equalities Commission and other partners to set up to explore the particular challenges facing black people living in Stevenage and will seek to pro-actively tackle community safety issues as they emerge.

5.4 Risk Implications

5.4.1 The strategic commitment of key stakeholders in the development of the strategy has helped to mitigate key risks such as focussing on the wrong priorities or those over which the partners have little impact or influence. Risks will continue to be considered as interventions develop through the ongoing work of RAG.

5.5 Policy Implications

5.5.1 The Strategy links into other key SBC policies including the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and the health and wellbeing strategy.

5.6 Staffing and Accommodation Implications

5.6.1 The posts within the Community Safety Team will be aligned to respond to the needs of the Strategy and the SoSafe Action Plan and other policies and procedures and in line with internal and external funding streams available.

5.7 Human Rights Implications

5.7.1 The development of the strategy has taken into account human rights including a person's right to defend their rights in the courts and compels public organisations (including local authorities and the police) to treat everyone equally, with fairness, dignity and respect.

5.8 Service Delivery Implications

5.8.1 The Strategy will influence and shape the work of the SoSafe Partnership and its delivery strands are clearly aligned back to the outcomes that are sought. This will also apply to the function of the Responsible Authorities Group that will oversee delivery of the strategy reporting to Stevenage Together.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Draft Community Safety Strategy 2021/24

Appendix B – Strategy Plan on a Page



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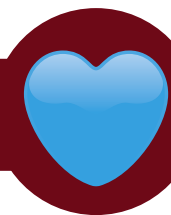
Making our town safer



Working Together to Make Stevenage Safer

Community Safety Strategy

2021



2024



01 293 616



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Foreword

I am pleased to present SoSafe's Community Safety Strategy for 2021/24. It outlines some of our successes and our priorities over the next three years and the actions we will take to address them.

Stevenage is a co-operative council that prides itself on collaborative working with partners and our communities. SoSafe will continue to address the issues our residents, visitors and those that work in our town as a priority, by involving you in the decision making and by consulting with you.

In future years, as in the past three years, our priorities are what the people of the town have told us they want to see us focusing on. This has followed a difficult year dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic where we have had to tackle crimes such as domestic abuse and those associated with drugs and alcohol differently and in many cases by meeting with people virtually. Our teams and partners have risen to these challenging times and have been able to support residents with many, and sometimes complex, needs whilst at the same time introducing new ways of working and initiatives that we will continue to develop over the next three years.

The town is rapidly changing; it is a growing, exciting, vibrant place with the regeneration in the town centre already taking shape which will attract new businesses and encourage people to invest in the town, its people and its homes. Our population is growing and the town has a broad cross-section of people who have chosen to live and work in Stevenage. The town continues to be a safe place with lowest level of dwelling burglaries in Hertfordshire. There will naturally be peaks in crime and anti-social behaviour. We are aware that people in certain parts of the town feel troubled by crime surrounding the use of illegal drugs and the impact on young people. SoSafe will continue to work co-operatively with our communities and stakeholders to address these issues in the months and years ahead.

Matt Partridge
Chief Executive



Matt Partridge

SoSafe is committed to building on progress made in recent years and will continue to work to reduce crime and disorder across Stevenage. Our partnership is strong and benefits from the clear commitment from a range of local organisations. SoSafe remains passionate about supporting the wellbeing of our residents, the town and creating safe environments for all of our communities. As there continues to be unprecedented pressures on public sector funding; this strategy will ensure that, as a co-operative council, we are effectively utilising all available resources to achieve value for money.

The values that underpin this strategy are based on co-operation. We will only tackle crime and anti-social behaviour through a shared approach, reliant on our residents and our partners. Over the following pages we have outlined those activities we have undertaken over the past 3 years and our plans for the next 3 years. I hope by reading this strategy you will see how SoSafe is working for the benefit of us all now and into the future.

Councillor Jackie Hollywell

Portfolio Holder – Community Safety



Councillor Jackie Hollywell

Introduction to SoSafe

SoSafe (Stevenage Community Safety Partnership [CSP]) is a strategic partnership, working to reduce crime and offending in accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. SoSafe is made up of key agencies that each brings their own unique specialism to the partnership. By working collaboratively with partners and our local communities, we have been able to make significant changes to the lives of those people who need support, guidance and advice, whilst tackling crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour.

The CSP includes the following organisations:

- Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)
- Hertfordshire Constabulary
- National Probation Service
- East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group (E&NH CCG)
- Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)
- Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS).
- Hertfordshire Trading Standards.

This strategy provides a framework for the many activities and initiatives that the partnership aims to deliver to improve community safety and community confidence in the town. Following consultation with members of the public and partners, this strategy identifies the priorities that SoSafe will focus on over the next three years.

Alongside this strategy, a detailed action plan is produced each year, which shows how SoSafe will achieve its aim and objectives. It contains specific targets and is monitored, updated and reviewed regularly.

The Community Safety Strategy has been developed with due regard to the following:

- Public consultation
- National developments and changes to legislation
- Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) plan Everybody's Business
- Annual Strategic Assessment for Stevenage 2019/20
- County Community Safety Unit (CCSU) domestic abuse strategy and the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Strategy
- CCSU drugs and alcohol strategy
- National Probation Service Reducing Offending Strategy
- Historical and Current Crime Data.
- Residents Survey
- Police Echo data

SoSafe could not achieve its objectives without help from the public. It is the duty of all citizens to play their part in making their communities safer. People can contribute by reporting crime and disorder, supporting criminal justice agencies, and by taking responsibility for their personal safety and the safety of others.

For ideas on other ways to get involved, please visit our website:
www.stevenage.gov.uk/town-and-community/community-safety/sosafe-community-safety-partnership

Responsible Authorities Group (RAG)

Responsible authorities are under a statutory duty to ensure partnership work is in place within the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The group meet regularly to review the strategic action plan, evaluate progress against identified priorities and share information

The responsible authorities are:

- Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)
- Hertfordshire Constabulary
- Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue (HFRS)
- East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group (ENHCCG)
- Hertfordshire County Council - Children's Services (HCC)
- County Community Safety Unit (CCSU)
- BeNCH Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC)

Co-operating bodies are:

- Police and Crime Commissioner's Office

Each responsible authority has the statutory duty to nominate a Designated Liaison Officer, whose role is to proactively facilitate information sharing between partners, ensure legislation is adhered to and that at least the minimum information sharing requirements are complied with.

Chair: Matt Partridge, Chief Executive, SBC Meet: Quarterly

Police and Crime Commissioners Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan

- Offender Pays
- Victims at the centre
- Business sense
- Public focus
- Protect local policing

County groups

- Community Safety Managers (CSM) meetings
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Herts Domestic Abuse Action Group (DAAG)
- Herts Safeguarding Board

Community Safety Strategy

Identify & Review

1. Help people feel safe
2. Reduce crime and disorder including criminal damage
3. Protect and safeguard vulnerable people
4. Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) co-operatively with partners
5. Breaking the cycle of substance misuse and offending

Deliver & Report

20-21 Action Plan

1. **Antisocial behaviour (ASB)**
Lead: SBC; Police SNT; Youth Connexions and HFRS.
2. **Hate crime**
Lead: SBC Community Safety; Police SNT; SAFS and CCSU.
3. **Safeguarding**
Lead: SBC Safeguarding; SBC Community Safety; Police SNT; HFRS and HCC Children's Services.
4. **Violent crime**
Lead: SBC Community Safety; Police SNT and SBC Licensing.
5. **Reassurance and public engagement**
Lead: SBC; Police SNT; Youth Connexions and HFRS.
6. **Scams and fraud**
Lead: SAFS; Trading Standards and Police SNT.
7. **Serious and organised crime (SOC) and drugs**
Lead: Police SNT and Crime Stoppers.

Joint Action Group (JAG)

JAG is an operational, multi-agency group responsible for delivering the Community Safety Action Plan. The group meet regularly to update on action points, identify any emerging problems and develop resolutions and initiatives aimed at reducing levels of crime and antisocial behaviour (ASB). The group also review and monitor community safety funding grants and ensure money is spent appropriately to deliver the priorities and issues identified.

The agencies involved include:

- Stevenage Borough Council – Community Safety; ASB; Safeguarding; Licensing; CCTV; No More Service; Homelessness; Environmental Health and Enforcement
- Hertfordshire Constabulary – ASB and Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT)
- Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue (HFRS)
- Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) – Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) and Trading Standards
- Youth groups – Youth Connexions; YMCA and Child UK
- Spectrum CGL
- Stevenage Haven homeless shelter
- Local housing associations

Co-Chairs: Catherine Davies; SBC & Patrick McPeake; Police
Meet: Four-weekly

Multi-agency groups

- **ASB Forum**
Chair: Mario Demetriou; CCSU Meet: Quarterly
- **Multiple Needs Working Group**
Chair: Catherine Davies; SBC Meet: Six-weekly
- **Healthy Relationships Healthy Babies**
Chair: Joella Scott, Meet: Quarterly
- **Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) Working Group**
Chair: Sarah Pateman; SBC Meet: Six-weekly
- **Stevenage Domestic Abuse Forum**
Chair: Melissa Bingham Meet: Monthly

Findings from the Stevenage Borough Council 2020 Community Survey

We asked members of the community: what makes Stevenage a safe place to live, work and visit? Some of the responses were:

- “Clean vibrant environments, communities looking after and taking pride in environments, low crime levels, flow of people, police presence, reduction in anti-social behaviour”
- “Friendly neighbourhoods, knowing your neighbours”

1 “Good policing/CCTV, positive town planning, a cared for community, a council and volunteers creating a community which supports vulnerable people, development and investment into the area”

2 “Good bus routes. Car free shopping centre. Good rail access. Visible police presence. Good communities. Generally good people.”

- “Cycle paths and walk ways are larger well lit up”
- “The open spaces, green city, trees and greenery”
- “The general environment. Park keepers/Street cleaners are so important.”

We also asked members of the community if there was anything that makes Stevenage unsafe. The answers have been ranked by number of responses, highest to lowest:

1. Dark, badly lit areas
2. Drug use/dealing
3. Young people and ASB
4. Underpasses
5. Lack of police presence
6. Speeding

The police have been collecting community views through their anonymous Echo system. The most talked about topic in Stevenage relates to drug use or dealing. This is followed by anti-social behaviour linked to youth, drug use and begging.

We then used social media to ask members of the Stevenage community to vote and comment on the five aims proposed for this strategy. 86% of votes agreed with the priorities proposed:

1. Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB
2. Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery
3. Promote reporting of hate crime and equality in the community
4. Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol
5. Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime

These findings, together with talking to residents through surveys and events (including ‘drop-ins’ and ‘street meets’ in the community) helped us to determine our SoSafe aims and objectives for the next three years.

At a glance;

What we did in 2018/21

Introduced our warden provision to the town centre and across the town to engage with the community and partners

What we are going to do in 2021/24

Teams will work co-operatively with the community through internal and external partners, including our town wardens, and give them an opportunity to get involved in projects and consultations on their local areas.

This is part of the Co-operative Neighbourhoods programme which will be developed further over the next three years.

Working in partnership with the community to tackle ASB and crime

Work with partners as early as possible to problem solve concerns raised by the community around ASB and crime.

Exploring the perception of youth crime

To provide targeted youth intervention and support through the No More Service.

We offered safe reporting and support for domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery

Expand our offer of accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse and modern slavery. Introduce further one to one support for perpetrators of domestic abuse.

We focused on safeguarding vulnerable people within the community, our Community Safety Youth Ambassadors supported North Herts College becoming a third party reporting centre for hate crime.

We will drive interventions to help people to feel safe & supported, as well as knowing where and how to report hate crime.

Key differences between 2018/20 and 2021/24 strategies

We are continuing to take a cooperative approach with partner agencies, volunteers and residents to help make Stevenage a safer place to live, visit and work. The 2021/24 Community Safety Strategy highlights how we work together by using multi-agency problem solving methods and consulting with the community of Stevenage. The aim is to promote effective long term change and to tackle crime and ASB. We have continued to monitor crime rates throughout the last three year period through Police Priority Setting meetings. These meetings, which take place every three months, consider the crime and ASB concerns within local communities and then set the community priorities for the following quarter.

The Joint Action Group (JAG) is the partnership information and problem solving group and the Responsible Authorities Group (RAG) which is the strategic partnership, which oversees the annual partnership action plan and other local and national plans and initiatives.

During 2018/21, we focused on helping people feel safe. As part of this we explored the perception of youth crime within the community and discovered that often the misconception that all young people cause ASB is based on a minority of young people causing nuisance. In the last strategy we outlined our Student Ambassador programme, which was successful promoting the positive role that young people have in Community. The 2021/24 strategy will focus on providing intervention and intensive support, through our No More Service, YC Herts and Multiple Needs Working Group to young people who are at risk of becoming involved in youth crime. By providing appropriate intervention we can change behaviour and reduce crime and the impact felt by the community.

We continue to prioritise safeguarding people. The partnership provides safe reporting together with support for domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery. The Safe Space innovative approach will continue to expand as it

aims to meet the needs of victims and survivors. We also provide domestic abuse perpetrator intervention and 1-1 support to change offending behaviour through the No More Service.

The 2021/24 strategy remains a key component of the council's Future Town, Future Council Place of Choice theme and its continuing efforts to tackle crime and help people feel safer; this Strategy will be pivotal to the town's wider Covid -19 recovery plan.

The strategy promotes the reporting of hate crime in an effort to reduce inequality and further develop inclusive neighbourhoods. We aim to help people feel safe and supported to report incidents where they have been a victim of hate crime as well as promoting community support networks. The Hate Crime strategy will be available on our website and training for staff, partner and volunteers will be provided. We will also provide information on where the hate crime reporting centres are in Stevenage (which includes Stevenage Borough Council offices and North Herts College). We will also play an active role in the Equalities Commission established for the town and will seek to drive recommendations proposed by this group.

The impact of drugs and alcohol continue to be a concern for the community. We are working cooperatively with residents to encourage the reporting of misuse of drugs and alcohol so we can address these issues. We continue to provide support to our residents with the most complex needs to help them make positive changes to their lifestyle and reduce the disruptive impact that they have on the community.

The strategy will also focus partnership working on the nuisance caused by speeding vehicles and environmental crime, such as fly-tipping. Our network of CCTV cameras support the police and other partners in tackling crime and ASB in the town and help to make Stevenage a safer place to live, work and visit.

Monitoring and measuring our performance

The SoSafe Action Plan and the commitment of the partners, including volunteers, are key to delivering this strategy. As a co-operative council we are aware that we can achieve more by working together to deliver all of the activities ensuring that SoSafe achieves its objectives and delivers for the needs of the town.

The SoSafe partnership has to rely on existing resources and making additional funding applications.

Below is a list of Successful External Funding Bids secured in 2018-21:

SADA	Stevenage/Survivors Against Domestic Abuse	£395,520
No More Service	Tacking drugs alcohol and offending behaviour	£42,500
Rucksacks Project	Providing rucksacks and essential items for rough sleepers	£900
Tackling youth crime	The SOS project working with youths	£15,000
Open Educa8	Police and partner funding project in schools in Stevenage	£2,000

How we will measure performance

Performance indicators are agreed annually and reflect the agreed priorities and outcomes whilst taking into account the views of our customers from their engagement with us. We will set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely); challenging targets and measures these four times a year to check that we are making progress. We will report on the progress made at our monthly Joint Action Group (JAG) meetings with partners; at the Stevenage/ Survivors Domestic Abuse (SADA) Board meeting and the Responsible Authorities Group (RAG) (strategic meetings with partners that meet quarterly to discuss the towns' Community Safety priorities).

To understand crime and associated disorder the Partnership needs to work together to address the underlying problems. Effective crime reduction relies on the partnership working with our communities and listening to what, and where, our problems are. This helps us to direct Partnership resources efficiently and effectively and to deliver services in the right place at the right time.

Crime trends are monitored regularly, and performance against our targets is reported to the RAG group. This group includes SoSafe's most senior managers and the elected councillor with responsibility for community safety. Additionally, elected councillors sit on a scrutiny committee which challenges SoSafe's performance.

Hertfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is the elected representative for policing matters who maintains strong links with the county's CSPs.

SoSafe Aims

We have established two overarching aims for the 2021/24 strategy:

- Consult with the community and work co-operatively with partners and residents
- Promote reporting of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

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SoSafe Objectives

Within SoSafe's overarching aims, we have established five key objectives:

1. Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB
2. Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery
3. Promote reporting of hate crime and further promote equality in the community
4. Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol
5. Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime

How our services support the objectives

Objective one – Divert young people from becoming involved in crime

- The 'No More' Service

Objective two – Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery

- Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse

Objective three – Promote reporting of hate crime and promote equality in the community

- The Hate Crime Strategy

Objective four – Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol

- The 'No More' Service

Objective five – Work with partners to address perceptions of crime and encourage reporting of crime

- Co-operative Neighbourhoods and working in partnership with our communities



**Don't suffer in silence
Put a stop to domestic abuse**

Objective One - Divert young people from becoming involved in crime

What will we do?

We are going to continue working closely with partners to take a multi-agency approach to reducing the risk of young people becoming involved in crime. We can work as a partnership to build the correct package of enforcement, intervention and support for each individual. We will use the tools and powers available to the partnership to deter crime from occurring. This includes the use of dispersal orders to address short term peaks of ASB.

We are developing initiatives to help young people make positive choices from becoming involved in crime. We will continue to provide routes out of crime. This includes being involved in knife crime awareness week, the use of knife amnesty bins and support to exit gangs.

We will be bringing the support service for young people, involved in violent crime, under the No More Service. Young people will be given an allocated worker who will build a team around them and who will contribute to developing their support plan. The young person will be assisted to explore the positive outcomes and consequences of their choices. They will be helped to address: homelessness, unemployment/leaving education, finances, offending behaviour, use of time, relationships, vulnerabilities/safety, domestic abuse and social choices.

What have we been doing?

Community Safety Ambassadors

We ran a Community Safety Ambassadors Project. The aim was to engage young people in our SoSafe community safety messages. We had six young people become ambassadors. They promoted personal safety to other young people during an event at North Herts College to, raise awareness of domestic abuse; attending the Life project run by Herts Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS), and giving personal safety items to members of the public in the town centre.

In 2019, we received a contribution to funding for a specialist youth worker from St Giles Trust charity to run the SOS Project in Stevenage as part of a countywide initiative. The SOS project aims to work with young people who are at risk of, or already involved in, violent offending or becoming involved in a gang. The SOS worker provides intensive 1-1 support to assist clients to change their behaviours and make positive choices. Clients are assisted in employment, housing and education. Thirty young people have been referred since the start of the project.

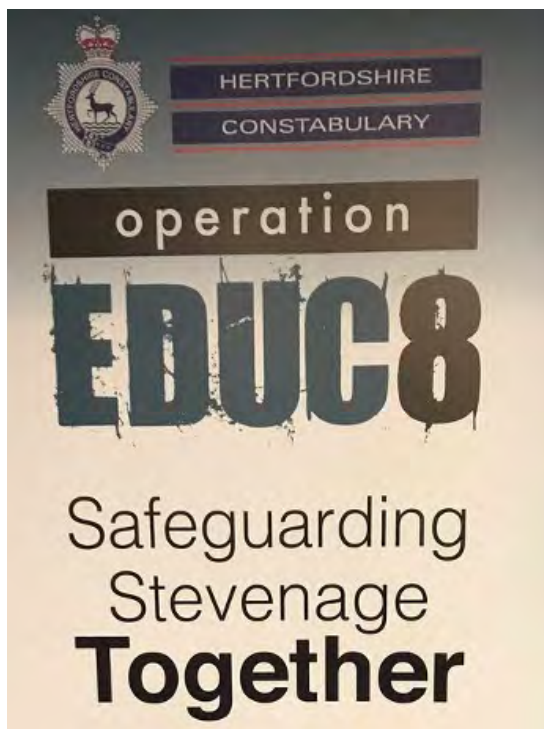
To complement the support offered by the SOS Project, the family are also referred to our multi-agency meeting, the Multiple Needs Working Group (MNWG). The aim is to provide support for any family member due to the young person's behaviour but to also offer support to address issues that contribute towards the young person choices.

Operation EDUC8 is a working group of police and teachers from each of the eight secondary education facilities across the town. It is supported by ELSA (Education Skills Learning and Achievement) and SADA. The model involves the designing of bespoke lesson plans to deliver year on year to each Year 8 pupil across the town as well as students from North Herts College. The aim is to raise awareness and educate the children so they can make informed decisions and prevent further instances of harm should they ever encounter, what we as professionals recognise to be, the four main threats to young people:- knife crime, gangs culture, drugs, online safety, and sexual exploitation and domestic abuse.

In January 2020 Operation Educ8 successfully delivered a keynote assembly on the topic of county lines gangs and knife crime. The speaker was criminologist and urban youth specialist Craig Pinkney. The assembly went out in all seven secondary schools and North Herts College and a follow up lesson plan was provided where the key themes were explored further. Just prior to lockdown in March 2020 (and the closure of the schools) we delivered two assemblies on the next topic of domestic abuse with follow up pastoral lessons across North Herts College (Hitchin and Stevenage campuses), this element was also supported by SADA.

Following the initial re-opening of schools in September 2020 we have had to rethink our delivery model as, at the time of writing, there is no scope for large scale assemblies. ELSA has now filmed an inspirational keynote talk on surviving domestic abuse and this film is being shown in year 8 classes across Stevenage. The students will then be taken through further lessons (supported by a bespoke lesson plan) where the key themes are explored further. For 2021 we will deliver lesson plans and supporting materials on child sexual exploitation and online safety; and in the future we also want to deliver on topics including the dangers arising from the misuse of drugs as well as repeating the lessons on gangs and knife crime.

YC Herts have been running projects across Stevenage. The Oval project engaged with young people around The Oval and delivered the Positive Alternatives Programme a Friday night project for 14-17 years as well as starting the Boys and Men project which looks at personal safety, sexual health and healthy role models.



Case Study The SOS Project

Lucy was never at home and would go missing, since being supported by the SOS project she has been staying at home more and occupying her time by attending a college course which commenced in September 2020 this has helped to prevent her from engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Lucy's support worker supported her to focus on her learning and the importance of talking things through which has helped to her to take the positive steps away from ASB and crime.

Objective two - Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery

What will we do?

We will continue to raise awareness by informing the public about how and where they can report domestic abuse; empowering victims to come forward and seek advice from our dedicated Stevenage/Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) team and the volunteers from the SADA Forum.

We will continue to grow our stock of safe spaces. These are private properties allowing victims to flee their dangerous environment to a safe home setting. These are available to individuals as well as families. Whilst staying in the safe space, SADA provide 1-1 support looking at meeting immediate needs and next step options. We provide food and toiletries - as we are aware some people are forced to flee their homes with nothing. We aim to meet the individual's immediate needs and also support the person to make the choices that are best for them. During the COVID pandemic we grew our safe spaces from two to 21, including some move on accommodation. This was in response to the number of referrals increasing and the refuges having to stop taking people in, in order to manage the COVID transmission risk. Our safe spaces have been full 90% of the time.

From April 2021, SADA has a county-wide project to support the ten districts and boroughs to support domestic abuse victims and their families. The pilot is part of the Domestic Abuse Bill and funded through funding received by Herts County Council.

We are expanding the intervention offered by the No More Service to domestic abuse perpetrators. The aim of this is to provide intensive 1to1 support to change offending behaviour to work with the No More Service to change offender's behaviour by providing 1-1 support to address offending behaviour and complex needs.





What have we been doing?

We have employed a further two Domestic Abuse Specialist Support Officers as we continue to grow the service in Stevenage and surrounding areas.

SADA now provides their DA support service to Stevenage, North Herts, East Herts, Welwyn Hatfield and is running a pilot in Hertsmere.

We continue to provide a drop in service as another method for people to engage and grow their own peer support network. This support has been able to continue during the COVID pandemic as the drop-in is running via a group video call. This continues to average at ten people attending per week.

During the COVID pandemic, from March 2020 to November 2020 there were 551 referrals into the SADA service, this was a 90% increase compared to the same period in 2019/20.

Twenty one parents have attended our ten week You, Me and Mum programme. The course looks at how parenting is impacted by domestic abuse and also looks at it from a child's perspective.

To raise awareness of domestic abuse reporting, we gave resource packs to businesses and held a conference to inform professionals of the impact of domestic abuse on children, the conference was called 'Through Emily's Eyes'.

We have appointed a Modern Slavery Champion and all of the Community Safety team have received First Responder training to help support and signpost victims of modern slavery for help and support. Awareness sessions have also been rolled out as part of our commitment to other departmental managers as part of our safeguarding service. During 2020 we have supported two victims of modern slavery.

Case Study

Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) – The Safe Space

Following a local authority referral, SADA moved a client and her daughter into the Move On property away from the area she was fleeing. Support was offered including support out of hours provided remotely during the pandemic throughout her stay. The client was able to live in the property which she said felt just like a family home whilst she was supported to find her forever home. The client and her daughter have now spent their first Christmas safe in their own home.

Objective three - Promote reporting of hate crime and promote equality in the community

What will we do?

We will embed the Hate Crime Strategy into our Partnership Action Plan and engage with the community in different ways to promote personal safety. This includes attending engagement events, promoting third party reporting centres and support available in the community. As a partnership, we will hold awareness events to promote what a hate crime is and how to report it. During these events we will have resources available to make sure that this information is as accessible as possible. These events may go ahead in person or virtually. Leaflets will be available in different languages, easy read versions and in braille. We understand it is important to promote the support available to people as much as possible.

We will continue to work with partners and the community to promote reporting of hate crime so the issue can be more understood and addressed. We have encouraged sites to become third party reporting centres for hate crime. This means that members of the community can report hate crime incidents where the professionals can report on your behalf and also give advice. The current third party reporting sites are Stevenage Borough Council, College, Police Station and the library.

We will also work with the Stevenage Equalities Commission to tackle inequalities relating to community safety and the work of the partnership.

What have we been doing?

During hate crime awareness week, we engaged with different faith groups to find out how safe they felt within Stevenage. We gave out information on how to report hate crime and what information and support is available.

We have continued to promote the use of third party reporting centres and have supported victims of hate crime by working co-operatively with partners and residents. The third party reporting centres are accessible in the town and include the Council Offices, North Herts College and the library. Anyone who feels they have been a victim of hate crime can attend the centres and an officer will be available for support.

Members of the Community Safety Team attended training in 2019 regarding the reporting of hate crime and supporting victims who may have been affected by hate crime.



Objective Four - Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol

What we are going to do?

We will continue to support people to break the cycle of substance misuse or offending behaviour by putting practical solutions in place to tackle issues that cause or exacerbate this behaviour. By doing this, the No More Service will reduce the impact of drugs; alcohol and crime have on the individual and the community. We work alongside other support and enforcement agencies to take a collaborative approach providing an individually tailored support plan to help break entrenched behaviour. The ethos of the No More Service is to improve the person's self-worth, help them to achieve positive outcomes (such as housing or a role in the community) enabling and motivating them to break the cycle of crime or substance use.

Every year we host Community Awards, where we celebrate the life changing progress our clients make. We will continue this tradition again next year.

We will continue to promote the services to engage as many clients as we can. We will continue with clients who are in prison to start their support plans before their release. We will be making contacts with the NHS, including at Lister Hospital and local GPs to encourage them making referrals to the No More Service for support around the misuse of drugs and alcohol. We will continue to work as a partnership to identify members of the community that needs access to support.

We are developing methods of befriending for our clients. We want to create a drop in, for people to attend for one off support, to reduce isolation by taking part in activities such as chess, classes or hobbies.



What have we been doing?

We have continued to develop an innovative approach to addressing substance misuse and offending behaviour. We now have two Complex Needs Advocates whose role is to provide support and guidance to individuals with complex needs (such as substance use, mental health and homelessness). These Advocates breakdown the tasks by discussing positives and consequences of the choices they can make and navigate the systems to access necessary support.

During the COVID pandemic, our clients have experienced many barriers, including struggling with their mental health and isolation, we have had to change our approach to engaging people. We increased our contact with our clients to help ease the feeling of isolation and the impact this can have on an individual's mental health. We worked with the Housing Options team to support individuals who were street homeless in the hotel accommodation as this was a good opportunity whilst they had a base to offer them support.

During the Coronavirus pandemic we supported clients by:

- adapting coping skills previously developed to manage with addiction and mental ill-health;
- reducing further isolation for our high risk offenders, who already have restrictions placed on them;
- managing within a situation of isolation and loneliness which can simulate prison, which has potential to trigger individuals and bring about relating behaviour;
- filling the gap where there has been a reduction in other support services, clients seeing a reduction in the existing contact with other agencies and feelings of support;
- changing routines, which have existed for many years;
- changing environment for clients that have been rough sleeping for a prolonged period of time and being able to adapt to rules and regulations attached to this accommodation;
- managing clients' anti-social behaviour whilst in their home for extended time, including conflict between neighbours;
- encouraging harm reduction messages due to change in their substance use methods.

The number of clients we are now contacting every week (and often twice a week) has increased by 157%.

As for some time we were not able to see clients face to face, we were able to apply for a grant from Stevenage Community trust to provide phones to clients that did not have them. This meant we could have phone appointments and they could also have contact with other support agencies. We have delivered food parcels to those whose finances were impacted by Covid and discussed their finances so they could become self-sufficient again.



Case Study

The No More Service

My support worker never lost their temper; they understood my grieving and were always there when I needed them. They spent time to explain things, in terms I could understand, like explaining letters I got sent. When they said they were going to do something, they would make the time to actually do it. They came back to help me even when I got annoyed. Whilst working with the No More Service they would help me access services that I needed to help reduce my addiction. I am now drug free. I still get texts from dealers but I just ignore them. I have completed grief counselling and I am taking my anti-depressants. I know if I need support with anything I can still call The No More Service and they will help me.

Objective Five - Work with partners to address perceptions of crime and encourage reporting of crime

What will we do?

We will be continuing our Tower Block Action Plan which engages the partnership to address any upcoming issue within any of our residential blocks. We have started to hold pop-up hubs in the tower blocks to speak directly to residents and gather more information on any issues they are facing. We have been holding these at different times of the day to give the greatest opportunity for people to attend around their own schedule.

The partnership is committed to developing an ongoing dialogue with the town's residents around issues concerning community safety. The findings from this survey will be added to throughout the lifetime of the strategy as the council and partners continue to engage with residents in a variety of ways. This will include utilising digital platforms, street meets and engagement exercises linked to the council's co-operative neighbourhood programme. Our aim is always to work on early solutions together. This will include focuses efforts on enviro-crime and flytipping which have been raised by residents in local neighbourhoods.

From April 2021 following successful funding we have introduced a pilot county-wide Youth No More Service, the service works with young people up to the age of 25.

What have we been doing?

We have engaged with residents to promote personal safety and discuss people perception of ASB and crime. We have attended events including Street Meets, PSPO Events, Operation Night Owl and engagement events in the town centre. We have also taken our SoSafe Partnership engagement events to other areas in local shopping precincts to speak to people who do not attend the town centre. We attended regular partnership walkabouts to patrol the areas and engage members of the public to raise awareness and encourage reports.

Instead of issuing fines for those suffering financial hardship we used Community Protection Notice Warnings (CPNW). These notices banned the individual from undertaking specific actions that were causing ASB. This could include, for example, not being allowed to sit within ten metres of a cash point, not to have an open vessel of alcohol or to be banned from a certain area they did not need to attend.

The Town Centre, Bedwell, The Hyde, The Oval and the High Street in the Old Town were previously subject to a public space protection order (PSPO). This has meant an individual could receive a fine if they were drinking alcohol, aggressively begging or urinating in the public space. The PSPO was reviewed in 2019 as it was due to expire. It was not renewed as the Partnership agreed that the use of community protection notices and warnings, together with Operation Urban's proactive work with the No More Service and housing were managing behaviour more effectively than the use of Fixed Penalty Notices were.



Some of our SoSafe Feedback Comments

“ I appreciate the daily calls as I have had no credit to call people. ”

*John - recently moved away from the town centre which had recently changed their routine and ability to socialise.

“ Thanks for everything and sorting out food bank, appreciate it a lot. THANK YOU AGAIN. ”

*David – Has been in lockdown due to his health and struggled to get food

“ I honestly can't thank you enough for all you have done for me and my family. You are the most amazing woman I've met you are amazing at your job and I wouldn't be where I am without you. ”

“ I am so glad we could do the weekly drug test via video link, as it helps prove to Social Services that I am no longer taking drugs. ”

*Louise

“ I just really want to say thank you for all your help over the past year and more. You've done so much to get me where I am today and I would not have been here without you! ”

“ I am so pleased with my gift bag of goodies and food for Christmas; I am pleased to be working with you. ”

“ People are clapping for the NHS again tonight but I'm going to clap for you and all the support you give me. ”

*Sandra – has daily contact due to mental ill health, neighbour disputes and social isolation

“ I really do appreciate the help you have given me and all the support and time you've put in. ”

*Lucy – Is experiencing a mental health crisis, struggling with a change in her routine and struggling to engage with mental health referral services as they require triage over the phone, something that she struggles with immensely.

“ Thank you for finding a safe place to call a home, I can't thank you enough. ”

Appendix

List of acronyms

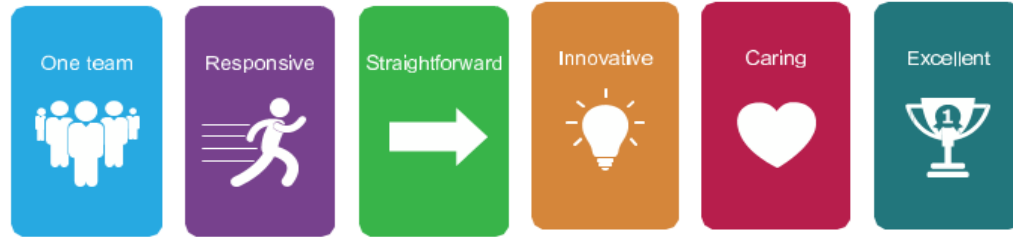
ASB	Anti-social Behaviour	E&NH CCG	East & North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group	RAG	Responsible Authorities Group
A&E	Accident & Emergency	HBV	Honour Based Violence	RJ	Restorative Justice
BeNCH CRC	Bedfordshire, Norfolk, Cambridge and Hertfordshire Community Rehabilitation Company (formerly Hertfordshire Probation)	HCC	Herts County Council	SADA	Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse
DASH	Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse: domestic abuse, stalking and honour based violence (risk assessment tool)	HFRS	Herts Fire and Rescue Service	SARA	Scanning, analysis, response and assessment
CCSU	County Community Safety Unit	IOM	Integrated Offender Management	SBC	Stevenage Borough Council
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television	JAG	Joint Action Group	SMART	Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely
Class A drugs	Heroin, methadone, cocaine, crack, ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines	LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender	SNT	Safer Neighbourhood Team
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service	LIFE	Local Intervention Fire Education	SOC	Serious Organised Crime
CPN/W	Community Protection Notice/Warning	LSP	Local Strategic Partnership	SoSafe	Stevenage community safety partnership
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation	MNWG	Multiple Needs Working Group	SoStevenage	Stevenage local strategic partnership
CSP	Community Safety Partnership	NMS	No More Service	YC Herts	Youth provision in Stevenage
DA	Domestic Abuse	NPS	New Psychoactive Substances		
DHR	Domestic Homicide Review	NPE	Night Time Economy		
		OPCC	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner		
		OWL	Online Watch Liaison		
		PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner		
		PCSO	Police Community Support Officer		



Draft SoSafe Community Safety Strategy 2021-2024 on a Page



Our values



Future town future council

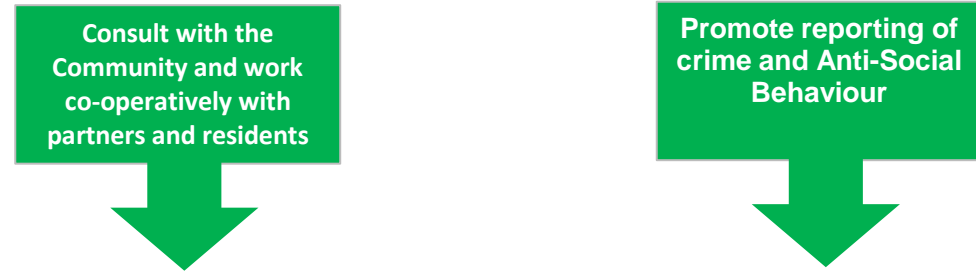
FTFC priorities



Strategic Objective

To provide a framework for the activities and initiatives that the SoSafe Community Safety Partnership deliver to improve Community Safety in the town

Aims



SoSafe Objectives

- Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB
- Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery
- Promote reporting of Hate Crime and equality in the community
- Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol
- Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perception of crime

How our services support the Objectives

Objective One - Divert young people from becoming involved in crime
SOS Project

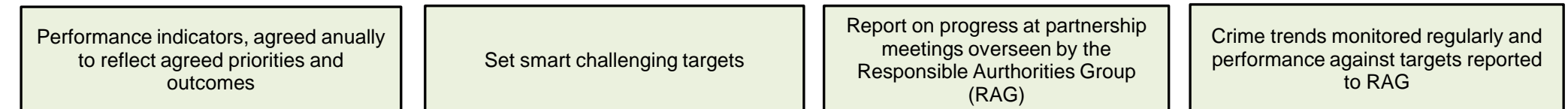
Objective Two - Provide safe reporting and support to Domestic Abuse Survivors
Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse

Objective Three - Promote reporting of Hate Crime and further promote equality in the Community
The Hate Crime Strategy

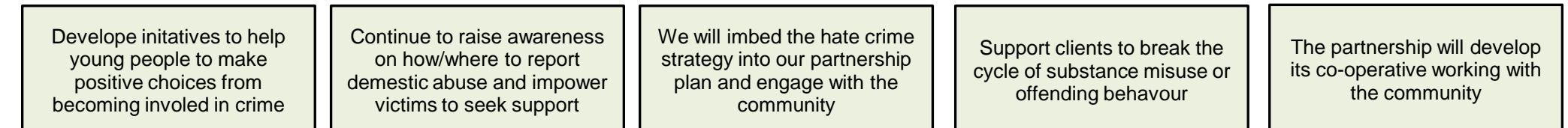
Objective Four - Tackle the harm caused by drugs and alcohol
The No More Service

Objective Five - Work with partners to address perceptions of crime and encourage reporting of crime
Co-operative Neighbourhood

Measuring performance



What we will do as part of the strategy



Finance

We will continue to apply for additional funding to further expand the services available as part of the SoSafe Community Safety Partnership

From 2018 to 2021 the partnership secured £455,920 in external funding

Informed by

The Council's Constitution includes the Community Safety Strategy as a Budget and Policy Framework item. The final report incorporating comments made by the overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Portfolio Holders Advisory Group was heard and considered at Executive for recommendation to Council, on the 14 July 2021.

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Meeting Council
Portfolio Area Resources
Date 21 July 2021



EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT

NON-KEY DECISION

Authors – Kirsten Frew Ext 2321

Contributors - Simon Banks and Florence Mutengesa

Lead Officer – Matt Partridge

Contact Officer – Clare Fletcher

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 In the Corporate Governance audit 2020/21 a recommendation was made to review the Employee Code of Conduct with particular reference to the arrangements for the management of gifts and hospitality. A similar recommendation was made for the review of the Code of Conduct for Members.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to present the revised and updated Employee Code of Conduct for approval.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the revised Employee Code of Conduct, as attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved.
- 2.2 That the revised Employee Code of Conduct be adopted for immediate implementation.
- 2.3 That the proposed measure that every employee must complete a declaration, confirming they have read the revised Employee Code of Conduct, be approved.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The current Employee Code of Conduct (Code) was approved in 2011 and has been issued to all employees of the Council since that date (Background Document 1).
- 3.2 Since then, there have been a number of legislative changes as well as technological advances in the world of work. This includes the implementation of the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Bribery Act 2010.
- 3.3 These legislative changes coupled with the growth in the use of social media have resulted in the Council and its employees attracting greater scrutiny than ever before.
- 3.4 Globally, there is greater interconnectedness and concerns about the role of Councils and their employees in supporting safeguarding of the vulnerable, removing discrimination and paying greater attention to the wellbeing of its employees.
- 3.5 Members will note that the Member Code of Conduct was approved in 2012; the Monitoring Officer is in the process of reviewing and updating the Member Code of Conduct (following the publication of the Local Government Association Model Code in December 2020). A report setting proposals to update the Member Code of Conduct will be brought forward to the Standards Committee and to Council for approval during the course of this year.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 Consultation on the proposed revised code (Appendix A) was undertaken with selected stakeholders. The Human Resources team are often the first port of call for guidance and expert advice on matters relating to working arrangements and employee conduct. The team provided input on procedural points, reflecting the issues about which they are frequently consulted.
- 4.2 Feedback was also sought and received from managers on the practical challenges of correctly interpreting policy and guidance relating to conduct.

- 4.3 The revised Code was also shared with trade union colleagues and the proposals received a positive response.
- 4.4 The revised Code seeks to reflect the changing operational environment and the consequent standards of behaviour expected from all employees, while also simplifying some of the language used, to make it more accessible to all employees.
- 4.5 The Employee Code of Conduct applies in all circumstances, whether work is carried out remotely, in the community or on Council premises.
- 4.6 A summary of the revised Code is intended to drive further accessibility and to encourage easy discussion of the required standards, within operational teams and on an individual level between managers and their direct reports. This can be found in Appendix B.
- 4.7 The revised Code provides clear guidance on how offers of gifts and hospitality are to be treated, to ensure propriety and protection of the Council's officers.
- 4.8 It also introduces an employee responsibility for safeguarding vulnerable people and this aligns with the Council's commitment to draw attention to this duty.
- 4.9 In response to increasing scrutiny from the Health and Safety Executive, the revised Code emphasises an individual employee's responsibility for their own health and safety and for colleagues in their work environment, in accordance with the Council's General Statement of Health and Safety 2019 (Background Document 2).
- 4.10 While the current Code is an integral part of employment contractual terms and conditions of service, there is no requirement for employees to specifically acknowledge its contents and obligations. By completing a declaration in the revised Code, it is envisaged that each employee commits fully to upholding the Council's standards of behaviour.
- 4.11 In light of these significant changes to the work environment, it is important that the Council sets out its expectations for all employees. Members are asked to approve the revised Code.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 The revised Code aligns with duties under the Bribery Act 2010 and the Council Financial Regulations 2020.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 Revision of the Code was undertaken with guidance from Legal Services. Alignment with legal provisions is outlined in the body of the report.

Risk Implications

- 5.3 None identified

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.4 Revision to the Code has been undertaken with due regard to the guidance and practice of the Equality Act 2010 and supports all efforts to avoid discrimination against protected characteristics as outlined in the Act.
- 5.5 An Equalities Impact Assessment was conducted and the potential for a negative impact from using difficult language identified. This has been mitigated by the development of a summary of the Code in simpler language, to aid accessibility and understanding. This aligns with the Council's choice to implement the socio-economic duty arising from the Act (Appendix C).

Safeguarding Children Implications

- 5.6 The revised Code introduces a specific safeguarding responsibility on each employee as a standard part of day to day work.

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 Employee Code of Conduct 2011
- BD2 General Statement of Health and Safety Policy 2019

APPENDICES

- A Revised Employee Code of Conduct 2021
- B Summary of Employee Code of Conduct
- C Equalities Impact Assessment

Stevenage Borough Council
Employee Code of Conduct

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Employee Code of Conduct is to provide a framework for staff behaviour, decisions and actions as public officials.
- 1.2 It is not an exhaustive list of what employees can and cannot do, but aims to help employees understand the standards that must be observed, including the ways in which staff should interact with elected Council Members, colleagues and the general public.

2. Operation and Scope of the Code

- 2.1 The Employee Code of Conduct (The Code) will operate in line with Stevenage Borough Council's (The Council) values, which are:

- Excellent
- Innovative
- Caring
- One Team
- Responsive
- Straightforward

- 2.2 This Code applies to all employees of the Council on JNC Red book and NJC Green book terms and conditions. Contractors, consultants or agency staff working with the Council will be expected to abide by the standards and principles set out in the Code.
- 2.3 This Code operates in conjunction with the Council's policies and procedures and financial regulations and all employees should familiarise themselves with them.

3. General Principles

- 3.1 The public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees of the Council. The role of all employees is to serve the Council in providing advice, implementing its policies and delivering services to the local community. In performing their duties, employees must act with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity.
 - 'integrity' is putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests
 - 'honesty' is about being truthful and open
 - 'objectivity' is basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence
 - 'impartiality' is acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well governments of different political persuasions

4. Accountability

- 4.1 Employees are accountable, and owe a duty to the Council to act in accordance with the principles set out in this Code, recognising the duty of all public sector employees to discharge public functions reasonably and according to the law.
- 4.2 Employees must present themselves at all times in a way that brings credit to the Council, whether in person, in the press or on social media. It is important that employees recognise the boundary between “work” and “home” when choosing contacts or groups on social media sites to ensure that they do not put themselves in a situation that could compromise their work and impartiality as council officers.
- 4.3 Employees should avoid posting derogatory comments about the Council on social media sites and must not engage in any social media activity that may be unlawful.
- 4.4 Representations in person or in the media that undermine the Council’s reputation may result in disciplinary action.

5. Political neutrality

- 5.1 Employees, excluding political assistants, must follow every lawfully expressed policy of the authority and must not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work. Where employees are politically restricted, by reason of the post they hold or the nature of the work they do, they must comply with any statutory restrictions on political activities.

6. Relations with members, the public and other employees

- 6.1 Mutual respect between employees and members is essential to good local government and working relationships should be kept on a professional basis. Employees should deal with the public, members and other employees sympathetically, efficiently and without bias.

7. Equality

- 7.1 Employees must comply with policies relating to equality issues, as agreed by the Council, in addition to the requirements of the law. Discrimination on grounds of race, sex, disability, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership, gender re-assignment, religion or belief, or age, is unlawful and also constitutes professional misconduct.

8. Stewardship

- 8.1 Employees must ensure that they use public funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner and must not utilise property, vehicles or other facilities of the Council for personal use unless authorised to do so.

9. Safeguarding

- 9.1** Safeguarding and the protection of children, young persons and vulnerable adults is everyone's responsibility. Protecting the vulnerable is not just a moral duty but a duty of care for every employee, volunteer or contractor of the Council who comes into contact with vulnerable people either directly or indirectly.
- 9.2** All employees must undertake training to equip them with information and tools to practice this duty in the normal course of their work, ensuring they observe the required professional boundaries.

10. Personal interests

- 10.1** An employee must not allow their private interests or beliefs to conflict with their professional duty. They must not misuse their official position improperly or use information acquired in the course of their employment, to further their private interest or the interests of others or to anybody else's disadvantage.
- 10.2** Employees should abide by the Council's rules and follow its guidance about the declaration of gifts offered to or received by them from any person or body seeking to do business with the Council or which would benefit from a relationship with the Council.
- 10.3** Employees whose posts are politically restricted under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 must ensure they comply with the restrictions imposed at all times, including registration of interests. Further information is available in the Politically Restricted Posts Policy.

11. Prejudicial interest

- 11.1** A prejudicial interest is considered to be a matter which affects the employee's financial interest or relates to a licensing or regulatory matter in which he or she has an interest and where a member of the public, who knows the relevant facts, would reasonably think that his or her personal interest is so significant that it is likely to prejudice his or her judgment of the public interest.
- 11.2** A prejudicial interest in a licensing or regulatory matter may stem from a direct financial interest or from a more tangential interest, where for instance approval for a licence may affect a body with which the qualifying employee has a personal interest or will affect him or her personally.
- 11.3** Employees with a prejudicial interest should notify an Assistant Director, Director or the Chief Executive of such an interest. Where possible, they should take steps to avoid influential involvement in the matter. Where this is not possible, their prejudicial interest should be made clear.

12. Whistleblowing

12.1 Where an employee becomes aware of activities which that employee believes to be illegal, improper, unethical or otherwise inconsistent with this Code, the employee should report the matter, acting in accordance with the employee's rights under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and with the Council's confidential reporting procedure or any other procedure designed for this purpose.

13. Disclosure of Information

13.1 Openness in the dissemination of information and decision making should be the norm in the Council. However, certain information may be confidential or sensitive and therefore not appropriate to share with a wide audience. Where confidentiality is necessary to protect the privacy or other rights of individuals or bodies, information should not be released to anyone other than a member, relevant senior officer or other person who is entitled to receive it, or needs to have access to it for the proper discharge of their functions.

13.2 Nothing in this Code can be taken as overriding existing statutory or common law obligations to keep certain information confidential, or to divulge certain information in keeping with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016 and Data Protection Act 2018.

14. Appointment of staff

14.1 Employees, when involved in the recruitment and appointment of staff, must ensure that appointments are made on the basis of merit. In order to avoid any accusation of bias, employees must not be involved in any appointment, or any other decision relating to discipline, promotion or pay and conditions for any other employee, or prospective employee, to whom they are related or with whom they have a close personal relationship outside work.

15. Compromising the impartiality of officers of the authority

15.1 An employee must not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for or on behalf of the Council, either directly or as a response to pressure from others. An employee should not attempt to force other employees to take action or change advice if doing so would prejudice their professional integrity.

16. Rewards, Gifts and Hospitality

16.1 It is a criminal offence under the Local Government Act 1972, for an officer of a local authority to demand or accept any fee or reward whatsoever other than their employment with the Council.

16.2 Employees must take note that it is an offence under the Bribery Act 2010 to offer, promise or give financial or other advantage to another person with the intention of

bringing about or rewarding improper performance of a public function. This might include offering any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing anything or showing favour or disfavour to any person in their official capacity.

- 16.3** It is also an offence under the Bribery Act 2010 to request, agree to accept or receive financial or other advantage with the intention that a public function be improperly performed or rewarded. This might include receiving any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing or not doing anything or showing favour or disfavour to any person in their official capacity.
- 16.4** Employees should therefore treat with extreme caution any offer or gift, favour or hospitality that is made to them personally as this offer or gift could be construed as being improper.
- 16.5** The following advice should be heeded in respect of the offer/receipt of gifts and/or hospitality from organisations or persons who seek to provide goods or services to the Council.
- 16.6** All gifts offered and/ or received must be registered on the Corporate Gifts and Hospitality Register.

The following may be acceptable:

- A modest gift of a promotional character given to a wide range of people and not uniquely to the employee. These gifts are usually given at Christmas time and include calendars, diaries, desk sets, flow charts, tape measures and other articles of use in the office or job;
- Gifts on the conclusion of any courtesy visit to a factory or firm of a sort normally given by that firm;
- A small gift where refusal would cause needless offence and the giver is not currently seeking a decision or business from the Council, but merely wishes to express thanks for advice or co-operation received, for example flowers or chocolates;
- An offer of hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the Council in the community, or where the function is part of the life of the community and the Council should be seen to be represented.
- Gifts such as bottles of wine should be declared on the register, for donation to the Mayor's charity.

16.7 Directors must be consulted before any response is given to the following:

- Invitations to business lunches or receptions which are likely to be fairly extravagant if only one employee has been asked. It is not always possible to know in advance whether a lunch will turn out to be a "champagne and caviar"

event. In such cases where it would cause offence and be undiplomatic to walk away from such an event, the matter should be reported to the Director on return;

- Substantial personal gifts which are simply delivered and where return might be difficult, e.g. a turkey received at Christmas. It may be acceptable to the giver for the gift to be subject to a raffle and the proceeds placed in a charitable fund;
- Tickets for events of any kind, i.e. theatre, sports, etc. In general, it is considered that offers of tickets for events will not be acceptable, although there may be limited occasions where acceptance will be appropriate.

16.8 The following must not be accepted under any circumstances. For an employee's own protection the offer of unacceptable gifts or anything which could be interpreted as a bribe must be reported immediately to the Sponsor Director.

16.9 Examples are:

- Any offers of cash regardless of the amount.
- Offers of major gifts or services e.g.:
 - Holidays
 - Hampers
 - Hotel or company accommodation
 - Offers to provide personal services to any employee, e.g. a building contractor offering to do work on an employee's house at no or reduced cost.

17. Special Circumstances

17.1 The above guidelines change completely if certain circumstances prevail, in which case any offers of any gifts or services should be reported immediately to the Director.

17.2 Examples are:

- Gifts etc. from Contractors seeking a major contract from the Council;
- Gifts from an applicant for planning permission to an employee who could have some influence on the matter;
- Gifts from an organisation with which the Council is in dispute;
- Gifts from organisations which are in dispute with each other and where the Council has some influence over the outcome;
- Any other circumstances where the receipt of any gift/hospitality could, however incorrectly, be interpreted as a bribe.

18. Personal Judgement

18.1 Clearly no set of rules can be comprehensive, but the following points should be considered in conjunction with the above guidelines:

- Always err on the side of caution, if in any doubt at all, ask your Assistant Director
- In cases where it is appropriate to refuse a gift, do it tactfully, explaining if necessary the policy over the receipt of gifts.

19. Health and Safety

19.1 All employees have a responsibility, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, to take care in undertaking their duties, to wear protective clothing and use any safety equipment issued to them.

19.2 All accidents or incidents at work or any health and safety risks must be reported to the relevant manager without delay.

19.3 All managers have a responsibility for the health and safety of their staff, taking all reasonable steps to ensure that all activities are carried out with due regard to the Council's safety policies.

19.4 Alcohol, drugs and substance misuse impairs judgement and can put employees, work colleagues and members of the public at risk. Abuse of any such substance whilst at work may be treated as a disciplinary offence.

20. Criminal Offences

20.1 Notwithstanding anything in this Code, all employees are required to comply with the provisions of section 117 of the 1972 Act, to declare an interest in any contract that they may have a direct or indirect pecuniary interest in and not to accept any fee or reward in the course of their employment other than their usual salary and associated employee benefits (if any).

An employee who breaches Section 117 commits a criminal offence.

20.2 Disclosure of criminal convictions

- Employees are required to declare any convictions or bind overs received during the course of their employment to their line manager (or in exceptional circumstances someone more senior) at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Employees should also declare any cautions received during the course of their employment if they relate to fraud or theft, or relate to any matter which would directly or indirectly impact on their responsibilities with regard to children, young persons or vulnerable adults, or if it is likely that the conduct for which

the caution was received would bring the Council into disrepute, taking into account the employee's work within the Council.

- In the event that an employee is unsure whether to disclose a caution or not they should contact Human Resources in confidence to discuss the matter. Failure to declare any such conviction, bind over or relevant caution, for whatever reason, may be regarded as gross misconduct under the Council's disciplinary rules.

21. Version Control

DOCUMENT HISTORY & VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Description
2	15/12/2020	SLT	Revised Code
2	13/01/2021	Staff Side	Revised Code

Projected Date for Review: 2023

22. Appendix 1

Declaration – Employee Code of Conduct

To be completed by ALL employees

I am aware that I am required to abide by the Council's Employee Code of Conduct as published on Stevenage Borough Council's Intranet and also available from my Business Unit Manager.

I understand that, as an employee of the Council, I am expected to demonstrate the highest possible standard of service and conduct to the local community we serve. I also understand that the Employee Code of Conduct forms part of my terms and conditions of employment.

I accept that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the requirements of the Employee Code of Conduct and that failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Job Title: _____

Business Unit: _____

Summary of Employee Code of Conduct

As a member of Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) staff, this is what the Council expects from you:

- SBC trusts you to always do your best, to manage the resources entrusted to you to the best of your ability, whether that is time, money or physical assets. If you abuse this trust, the Council will take all necessary steps to protect itself, including disciplinary action where necessary.
- Remember that wherever you are, including virtually and on social media, you represent the Council. Your actions, your appearance and anything you say, must not discredit the Council in any way.
- You should treat all colleagues, members and the Council's clients and tenants with dignity, respecting the differences that are in our community. You must not discriminate against anyone because of who, or what they are.
- You are the Council's eyes and ears for the safeguarding and protection of children, young persons and vulnerable adults. If you come across anything of concern, make sure you report it.
- You must not use your official position for your advantage or for your friends and family. If you have a personal interest in one of the Council's activities, you must declare it.
- You must not breach the professional boundaries set for your service area.
- Be careful when accepting gifts or rewards as this may be considered a bribe. All gifts must be declared. If in doubt about any offer you receive, check with your manager.
- Together with the Council, you have a personal responsibility for your health and safety. You must not do anything at work that endangers you or your colleagues or the general public.
- The Council has a zero tolerance policy for consuming alcohol and drugs at work. Disciplinary action may follow if you abuse this or if you are in an incapacitated state at work.
- Whatever your role is in the Council, you should act with integrity, honesty, impartiality and objectivity. If you come across anything that you believe to be illegal, fraudulent or improper, report it. You can use the Whistleblowing Procedure if you wish to protect your identity.

Check the Intranet for the full details of the Employee Code of Conduct.

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Brief Equality Impact Assessment

For a minor operational change / review / simple analysis

What is being assessed?	Revised Employee Code of Conduct	What are the key aims of it?	To refresh the provisions of the Code and align them to new and updated legislation and guidance from the Equality Act 2010, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Bribery Act 2010.		
Who may be affected by it?	All SBC staff				
Date of full EqIA on service area (planned or completed)	N/A				
Form completed by:	Florence Mutengesa	Start date	1/12/2020	End date	4/6/2021
		Review date	2023		

What data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	Workforce information 2019 (Equality & Diversity information for Stevenage 2019-20)	Have any information gaps been identified along the way? If so, please specify	NA
--	---	--	----

Explain the potential positive, negative or unequal impact on the following characteristics and how likely this is:			
Age	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.	Race	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.
Disability	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.	Religion or belief	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.
Gender reassignment	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the	Sex	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the

	protected characteristics.		protected characteristics.
Marriage or civil partnership	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.	Sexual orientation	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.
Pregnancy & maternity	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.	Socio-economic ¹	The Code is a framework that aligns with the provisions of the Equality Act. It will support action with due regard of the protected characteristics.
Other	<p>The Employee Code of Conduct forms part of the Council Constitution and therefore there are limitations on the changes that can be made to the language used. The Code may therefore not be easily understood in some pockets of the workforce.</p> <p>This is mitigated by the use of more straightforward language in the summary Code.</p>		

Where there is a likely positive impact , please explain how it will help to fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	The revised Code draws attention to the obligation to avoid discrimination in all its forms. This will assist compliance with the Equality Act 2010.	Promote equal opportunities	In line with the provisions of the Bribery Act 2010, clarity is provided on the protocols for receiving gifts. This is intended to protect the workforce from outside pressure	Encourage good relations	With a new emphasis on safeguarding, the revised Code promotes the protection of the vulnerable in the community, as a built in radar in the delivery of

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.

			for preferential treatment as well ensuring a consistent approach towards gifts, across the whole organisation.		Council services. This is intended to support community relations as well as the building of strong relationships in the workforce.
--	--	--	---	--	---

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			
NA			

Approved by Strategic Director: Clare Fletcher

Date: 22/06/2021

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

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Meeting: COUNCIL
Date: 21 JULY 2020

ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT 2020/2021

Author – Stephen Weaver (on behalf of the Scrutiny Members) Ext.No. 2332

Lead Officer – Tom Pike Ext. No.

Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext.No. 2332

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during the 2020/21 Municipal Year and to outline the Work Programme for the three Committees for 2021/22.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2020/21 be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Council's decision making process, by having overview of the Council's decision making, holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in" decisions for reconsideration and undertake internal and external scrutiny reviews.
- 3.2 The Council's Constitution requires that there be an annual report to Council on the scrutiny activity over the past Municipal Year (see Article 6.3 of the Constitution).
- 3.3 This report is a retrospective look at the scrutiny review work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the two Select Committees during the 2020-21 Municipal Year.
- 3.4 In accordance with the Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also charged with scrutinising the Executive's proposals on Budget & Policy Framework items that go before Council for decision. In addition the Committees considered updates on Scrutiny studies that had been undertaken previously, examining the progress of recommendations and where appropriate following up on matters raised.
- 3.5 The Committees have also worked with their relevant Executive Portfolio Holders on a number of separate policy development meetings developing

policies and considering reports before their submission to the Executive. This report, however, focuses on the Committees' Scrutiny role.

4. SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEWS FOR 2020/2021

4.1 The amount of work that the two Select Committees undertook in 2020/21 was severely hampered by Covid-19. The meetings were initially delayed in starting due to the corporate focus on the pandemic and then after only a few months of the Committee's holding meetings from September to December 2020 the decision was taken following the second wave of the pandemic to suspend the support for the formal Committee meetings of the Select Committees from January until the close of the municipal year. This was so corporately the Council could prioritise and focus on resilience, business continuity, and providing support for the vaccine roll out and the public health response. However, a sub-group of Members from the Environment and Economy Select Committee were able to continue to meet informally to progress a strand of the review looking at the impact of the pandemic on young people.

4.1.1 Each Select Committee review made formal recommendations to the relevant Executive Member, officers and external partners. The following is a summary of the outcomes of each scrutiny review.

4.2 Community Select Committee

4.2.1 Once the Community Select Committee was able to hold formal meetings it met in October 2020 to sign off and complete the final report and recommendations into the review of Sports and Leisure in Stevenage, and looked at the Member Complaints Your Say System.

4.2.2 Sports and Leisure Review

The Sports and Leisure review made 24 recommendations in total, these included:

- 6 recommendations specifically around improved accessibility to sports & leisure opportunities linked to health benefits
- 9 recommendations around improved marketing opportunities and use of the website
- 6 recommendations regarding infrastructure improvements
- 3 recommendations suggesting improved liaison between SBC and SLL

As the review was undertaken before the Covid-19 pandemic a large number of the recommendations were unable to be actioned by officers but the Executive Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People, Leisure and Culture welcomed the report and has stated that the review was a helpful reference point for the beginning of the process to review the Leisure Contract for 2023.

4.2.3 Member Complaints - Your Say System

4.2.4 Members had asked for this matter to be scrutinised due to the variable performance of some of the Council's back office responses to the public's service requests and then complaints during the pandemic. Members had noticed that some business units were still able to respond quickly but that other areas were being affected more acutely by the pandemic. Following the meeting with the Assistant Director (Digital & Transformation) Members concluded that (i) Members felt that they were not always kept informed of the position with complaints, once the 10 day response time target was passed; (ii) It was noted that an improved digital solution for complaints (expected to be in place by April 2021 at the latest) would help to track responses to ensure that target times were met; (iii) The Assistant Director (Digital & Transformation) undertook investigate the position with regard to Members being advised when complaints cases were closed, and agreed to bring back more information on the complaints system at a future meeting of the Committee.

4.3 Community Select Committee sitting as the Council Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee

4.3.1 Once again the statutory requirement to hold an annual meeting of the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee was not fulfilled in 2020-21 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The meeting has been routinely held in March each year as this is the most opportune time to hear about the performance of the Responsible Authority Group, SoSafe Community Safety Partnership against the Community Safety Action Plan for the current year and to look ahead at the emerging priorities for the forthcoming Municipal Year. Since the resumption of Select Committee meetings in 2021-22 Municipal Year it has still not been possible to hold the meeting as officers have advised that the data was not collected in the usual way as the Police and partners focus has been on the response to the pandemic. Officers have advised holding this meeting in March 2022 when the data will be available.

4.4 Public Health meeting with the HCC Director of Public Health

4.4.1 The focus of the meeting with the Director of Public Health was once again on the Covid-19 pandemic. Members discussed the measures that HCC Public Health were taking in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Director of Public Health answered Members questions regarding the pandemic. Members also received an update from the Council's Health and Sports Strategy Manager on the actions and delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2022. A further meeting focusing on public health will be scheduled for the 2021-22 Municipal Year focusing on the public health recovery from the pandemic, the timing of this will be dependent on the availability of the HCC Director of Public Health and once the meeting arrangements have been established for the year.

4.5 Environment & Economy Select Committee

4.5.1 Once the Environment and Economy Select Committee was able to hold formal meetings it met in September 2020 to receive more evidence and updates into its review into the Neighbourhood Centres and it met again in January 2021 to sign off the report and recommendations. The Committee also began its substantive piece of work in reviewing into the Economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Stevenage and the local economy and the Council's response, with meetings in November 2020 and January 2021.

4.5.2 Neighbourhood Centres Review

4.5.3 This review had begun in 2019-20 but had been paused due to the pandemic, but had managed to carry out a number of site visits with a large number of officer's support from the wide range of business support units that are engaged in providing services to the various neighbourhood centres around the town. Members and officers visited 5 neighbourhood centres to compile their report. The centres visited were Oaks Cross, The Oval, Symonds Green, Bedwell and St Nicholas. The review also and undertook a table top exercise review for a further 4 neighbourhood centres.

4.5.4 The review managed to highlight a number of local actions that needed to take place to improve the areas and these were taken up with officers following the site visits and a large number of these actions were completed. These included issues such as; replacement of missing trees in planting areas; clearing of fly-tipping; work on broken steps and retaining walls; deep cleaning of pedestrian and car parking areas; and painting of street furniture. In addition the review provided a more strategic look at what is needed in the various neighbourhood centres and made 5 recommendations covering issues such as:

- That small scale timely interventions be made using what means are at the Council's disposal including its current regime of routine maintenance, cleansing, repair and using existing budgets and LCBs (both SBC & HCC)
- That partner authorities/partner bodies be approached to hold them to account for failure to maintain infrastructure
- That the Co-operative Neighbourhood Management approach to addressing local issues in the Neighbourhood Centres be monitored by the Executive Member with Portfolio responsibility for Neighbourhoods and Co-Operative Working to see if this is working
- That where possible and appropriate each Neighbourhood Centre area establishes a friends group to help with projects and areas like community gardens at each Centre

- That the Head of Estates and the Assistant Director Housing Development be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to contribute to the recommendations with regard to these plans

4.5.5 The Committee received the Executive Portfolio Holder response to the review in July 2021 and agreed to monitor progress with the strategic response to Neighbourhood Centres at a future meeting and to meet with the Head of Estates and the Assistant Director Housing Development to understand the Council's plans to regenerate the neighbourhood centres.

4.5.6 **Economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Stevenage and the local economy and the Council's response**

4.5.7 The Committee started its review of the Economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Stevenage and the local economy and the Council's response with its first meeting in September 2020 and then a further evidence gathering and witness interviews in November 2020. Whilst the formal work of the Select Committees were temporarily suspended from January 2021 to the end of the 2020-21 Municipal Year it was possible for a group of Members to carry on meeting informally in a sub-group looking at the impact of the pandemic on young people. The sub-group were supported by the Scrutiny Officer and a number of partner bodies who made the time to meet with the group. The sub-group met six times from January to March 2021 and provided a report to the Select Committee in June 2021, which the Committee agreed as part of its recommendations going forward. The Committee are due to meet again in September 2021 to conclude their review and will then be making its recommendations in due course.

4.6 **Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

4.6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 10 occasions to provide overview of the work of the Executive, specifically looking at all Key Decisions made by the Executive and all Budget and Policy Framework items and in particular monitored progress of the Council and the Executive's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to these meetings the Committee also considered the following review:

4.6.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the final report and recommendations of its review into the Council's scrutiny arrangements at its meeting in March 2021. The work had been undertaken in the previous Municipal Year when the Committee sat as a Select Committee to review and make recommendations on the Council's scrutiny arrangements.

4.6.3 The review made recommendations in 8 areas including: work programming; scoping; evidence gathering including site visits and interviews; final reports and recommendations; monitoring outcomes; pre-scrutiny; call-in arrangements; and future oversight of changes brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.6.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the Leader's response to the review as the lead Executive Member when it met in June 2021, all but one of its recommendations were agreed.

5.1 **2021/2022 Scrutiny Work Programmes**

5.1 Due to the impact on resources to support the scrutiny committee meetings in quarter 4 of 2020-21 (Jan – March 2021), the usual practise of canvassing Members early and bringing options to Members in February/March was not possible. As such the Committees have been provided with work programme reports to consider and agree in June/July 2021. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Economy Select Committee have both now met and agreed their work programmes for 2021-22. At the time of writing the report the Community Select Committee had not yet met and was due to consider its work programme on 15 July 2021.

5.2 Environment and Economy Select Committee:

The Environment & Economy Select Committee agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- (i) Continuation of the review of the economic impact of Covid-19 on Stevenage and the Council's response;
- (ii) Climate Change Strategy. Initially the Committee will focus on the Council's delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and then it intends to interview each Executive Portfolio Holder to find out how their strategies and forward planning are being shaped by the Climate Emergency. Some of the issues the Committee will consider include individual issues such as recycling, grasslands, trees, transport and parks (it could be possible that this will be a dominant feature for at least two years).;

As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake pre-scrutiny Policy Development work in Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings as directed by SLT and the Executive Portfolio Holders.

5.3 Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme:

5.3.1 In addition to undertaking all scrutiny of Budget & Policy Framework items and decisions of the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the capacity to undertake a "Select Committee" style meeting during the year if it so wishes. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not specifically agree to sit as a select Committee but has the capacity to do so if it required. The Committee agreed to add the following items to its work programme:

- I.T outage incidents (to remain on the Work Programme pending the output from a proposed all Member briefing seminar).
- Consider the Resident and Tenant Survey (to be directed by the Assistant Director, Community)

As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake pre-scrutiny Policy Development work in Portfolio Holder Advisory Group meetings, as directed by SLT and the Executive Portfolio Holders.

5.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions and also consider all 'Call-in' requests in accordance with the Council's Constitution as well as considering any Councillors Call for Action in relation to matters relating to Resources and any Petition appeals, in accordance with the Councils Petition Scheme, regarding matters relating to Resources or of a Corporate or Council wide nature.

5.5 Scoping reviews

5.5.1 A schedule of generic dates for meetings for the two Select Committees has been arranged for the 2021-22 Municipal Year, as and when specific meetings are scheduled from these dates electronic diary invites will be sent to Members on the Committee. These meetings will incorporate the scoping of the review where Members will identify the areas they wish to cover during the review, who to interview, what evidence/background information is required and which Members will lead the questioning on a specific area, as well as undertaking site visits, where appropriate. Meetings will also be arranged to revisit previous reviews to monitor actions.

5.6 **Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups (Policy Development Meetings)**

5.6.1 Pre-scrutiny Policy Development meetings will continue to be undertaken as and when requested by Executive Portfolio Holders in consultation with Assistant Strategic Directors and will be referred to as Portfolio Holders Advisory Groups (PHAG). These meetings are chaired by the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder and the relevant O&S or Select Committee Members are invited to attend. Unlike regular Select Committee meetings PHAG's are private meetings not open to the public.

6. **IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 **Financial Implications**

There are none specific to this report.

6.2 **Legal Implications**

Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government Statutory Guidance on Overview & Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities was published in May 2019 and Scrutiny Members should have regard to this when undertaking their Scrutiny review work and carrying out the function.

6.3 **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

Equalities and Diversity issues are considered at the scoping stage of each Scrutiny review with regards to questioning of witnesses and the collection of

oral and written evidence. Also E&D issues are addressed in the final report for each review.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Local Government Act 2000.

Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government Statutory Guidance on Overview & Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities.

Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Individual agendas and study material for each Scrutiny review undertaken by the Select Committees as described in this report are available for inspection.

The full Executive responses to the Scrutiny Reviews are available for inspection.

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 9 February 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Councillors: Teresa Callaghan (Chair), John Gardner (Vice-Chair), Stephen Booth, Laurie Chester, Graham Lawrence and Mr Geoffrey Gibbs (Independent member).

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00 pm
End Time: 6.52 pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr and Lizzy Kelly.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 17 NOVEMBER 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **EXTERNAL AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2019/20**

Neil Harris from Ernst & Young (E&Y) provided an update to Members on the External Audit accounts for 2019/2020. Neil Harris (E&Y) advised Members that the audit accounts for 2019/20 had not been concluded yet. He explained that he was liaising closely with the Council officers to reach a conclusion.

In answering a series of questions from the Chair and Members of the Committee, Neil Harris (E&Y) advised Members that he needed more time to conclude as there were 2 main outstanding issues as well as some smaller outstanding queries to be resolved by SBC. He advised Members that he would keep them updated on the report's progress and stressed that he is fully resourced to conclude the report.

In responding to a question from a Member, Neil Harris (E&Y) explained that he had re-assessed his target date for concluding the External Audit accounts in early January as the EY was not able to meet that deadline and following discussion with officers, a collective decision had been taken to aim to conclude it by March.

The Strategic Director (CF) advised Members that this year had been difficult, as staff had been working remotely and there were some outstanding queries that her Team was working to respond, but the delay in receiving PPE queries from EY had

meant these enquiries are currently being dealt with by the Finance department.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That Neil Harris (E&Y) keep Members of the Committee updated on the External Audit accounts 2019/20.
2. That the External Audit accounts 2019/20 be completed in readiness for consideration by the Committee in March 2021.
3. That the verbal update be noted.

4 **INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2020/21 - PROGRESS REPORT**

The SIAS Client Audit Manager updated Members on the Internal Audit Plan for 2020/21. He outlined the details of high priority audit recommendations and the progress made since last update. He provided the following key updates:

1. Housing repairs
2. Tree Management
3. Council's Shared Anti-Fraud Services
4. 28 out of 29 audits had been completed.

He informed Members that the Homelessness & Housing Advice and Housing Allocations audits were deferred to Q1 or Q2 of 2021/22 in agreement with the Council, due to operational pressures arising from the Council's pandemic response.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the amendments to the Internal Audit Plan, as at 22 January 2021, be approved.
2. That the status of critical and high priority recommendations be noted.
3. That the Internal Audit Progress report be noted.

5 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS 2021/22**

The Strategic Director (CF) updated Members on Annual Treasury Management Strategy including Prudential Code Indicators for 2021/2022. She advised Members that the Annual Treasury Management Strategy including prudential indicators was forward looking, which included the following:

- Treasury Management Strategy
- Investment Strategy
- Capital Plans and prudential indicators
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy

It was **RESOLVED** that the following amendments to the report be reported to the Executive for onward recommendation to Council:

- On Paragraph 4.5.3, the operational boundary – inclusion in this paragraph of the actual amount, as set out in the Strategy itself (Appendix A).
- On Paragraph 4.6.1 the date in the final row of the table, should read December 2020 instead of 2021.
- References to Queensway Properties LLP, should be changed to Queensway Properties (Stevenage) LLP.
- On Paragraph 4.3.3 – the colours in the table on projected external investment balances contained in this paragraph to be changed to make the table easier to read.

6 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

7 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

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

8 **PART II MINUTES - AUDIT COMMITTEE - 17 NOVEMBER 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 24 March 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Virtual (via Zoom)

Present: Councillors: Teresa Callaghan (Chair), John Gardner (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Laurie Chester, Lizzy Kelly, Graham Lawrence and Mr Geoffrey Gibbs (Independent member).

Start / End Start Time: 6.00 pm

Time: End Time: 7.39 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Booth and David Cullen.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 9 FEBRUARY 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on Tuesday 9 February 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PROPOSED SAFS ANTI-FRAUD PLAN 2021/22 AND PROGRESS WITH 2020/21 ANTI-FRAUD PLAN

Nick Jennings from the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) presented the Anti-Fraud Plan for 2021/22. He provided details of the Council's Anti-Fraud and corruption arrangements for 2021/22.

Members were briefed on set of measures in place for staff and members of the public to report suspicions of fraud through a number of channels. Nick Jennings informed Members that SAFS were on target dealing with fraud cases for 2020/21, but was concerned on two areas where the cases had fallen, namely staff referrals and referrals on housing fraud. He advised Members that the shortfall in cases could be the impact of Covid-19, but assured Members that SAFS was closely working with officers to generate greater awareness.

In discussing the key issues, Members noted that there were number of cases that had been held up due to the Covid-19 restrictions and were also related to the Government decision on temporarily banning house evictions.

Members noted the frameworks and procedures were in place to prevent fraud and protect the Council and customers. Members were assured that the Council was in

strong position to deter any opportunistic or serious fraud.

The Committee were in agreement that the current arrangement to protect the Council against fraud and corruption remained effective, resourced and fit for purpose.

In response to a question from a Member, Nick Jennings advised Members that between April and December 2020 SAFS had received 100 allegations of fraud affecting Council Services. SAFS had carried forward 82 live cases from 2019/20 and currently 62 cases were open and under investigation.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the Anti-Fraud Plan for 2021/22 be approved.
- That the activity taken to protect the Council against fraud and corruption in 2020/21 be noted.

4 **SIAS INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2020/21 - PROGRESS REPORT**

An updated report was received in relation to the progress made by the SIAS in delivering the Council's 2020/21 Internal Audit Plan. The report set out the periodic update for the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21.

In discussing the key issues, Members noted the following final reports had been issued since the last Audit Committee meeting on 9 February 2021:

- Housing Repairs
- Cash and Banking
- Tree Management
- Landlord Health and Safety Compliance

In response to a question from a Member, the SIAS Client Audit Manager advised Members that there was a limited assurance level on Landlord Health and Safety Compliance. This was because of the actions arising from the water risk assessment and monthly water temperature monitoring, the remedial work was due to be completed this month, and he would update Members on the issue at the next Committee meeting.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the Internal Audit Progress report be noted.
- That the Status of Critical and High Priority Recommendations be noted.

That the Proposed Changes to SIAS Audit Opinions be approved.

5 **PROPOSED SIAS INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2021/22**

The SIAS Client Manager presented the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22. The report set out the indicative internal audit start periods.

In response to a question in relation to the Covid-19 impact and disruption to the service, the SIAS Client Manager advised Members that there were two six month plans, and after Quarter 1 and 2, there would be discussions with the officers to review the current position on Covid-19 impact, and this would be reported to the Committee.

The Committee noted the report and acknowledged the assurance SIAS provided on internal audit arrangements to the Council.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22 be approved.

6 **SECTION 106 AGREEMENTS**

The Assistant Director for Planning and Regulatory presented a report in relation to the breakdown of the Section 106 balances and the requirement of each specific scheme. He advised Members on the Section 106 spent for 2019/20, and informed Members that the Council was liaising closely with Hertfordshire County Council Highways to spend £148k on Parking/Transport and £35k for a pedestrian link in the next year.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the Section 106 Agreement report be noted.

7 **JOINT ICT INVESTMENT STRATEGY - PROGRESS**

The Strategic ICT and Shared Partnership Manager provided an updated on the Joint ICT Investment Strategy. He outlined the ICT challenges the Council faced at the start of the 2020. He informed Members that there had been progress on the improvement works with crucial months ahead. There had been a huge impact on the service because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the new ways of remote working.

The Strategic ICT and Shared Partnership Manager provided the following key updates to the Committee:

- Supporting the home- working environment.
- Rolled out of laptops in summer 2020 to those who requested one.
- Final stages of the network project were underway; servers, switches and other equipment for the new network were being prepared, and would go live in May 2021, which would provide more stability to users.
- The new hosted desktop would allow users to connect to the updated and improved tools like Windows 10 with better security. This would go live in July

2021.

- Improving online services to provide more services via self-service.

Members were briefed on details of Paperless Committees Project, which would help the Council in running smooth committee meetings and combat climate change.

In discussing key issues, Members noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had created an unprecedented set of challenges. The shift in ways of working and of accessing services was fundamental and the Council needed to quickly build upon the foundations already established.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the Joint ICT Investment progress report be noted.

8 **REVIEW OF CORPORATE AND SERVICE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

The Senior Performance and Resilience Officer provided an update on the Review of the Corporate and Service Governance arrangements. She outlined the activity carried out in 2020/21 to strengthen the Council's corporate governance arrangements.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the progress on corporate governance enhancement activity during 2020/21 be noted.
- That the corporate governance enhancement activity identified for 2021/22 to be included in the Council's 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement be noted.
- That the progress of Service Governance Actions identified by the Service Assurance Review carried out in April 2020 be noted.

9 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

Audit and Statement of Accounts for 2019/20

The Strategic Director for Finance and Estate (CF) provided an update on the Audit and Statement of Accounts for 2019/20. She informed Members that the accounts had not been signed off as expected from Ernst and Young (E&Y), and she proposed a provisional date for the Audit and Statement of Account Committee meeting to be held during the week commencing Monday 26 April 2021. The Assistant Director (NP) for Finance and Estate provided further update on the matter and explained that he was confident of getting the accounts signed off on time for a meeting in the week commencing 26 April.

10 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

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

2. That Members considered the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

11 **STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

The Senior Performance and Resilience Officer provided an update on the latest Strategic Risk Register. The report set out the latest Strategic Risk Register and the development on risk management issues.

Members noted the content of the report.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the latest Strategic Risk Register be noted.
- That the developments on risk management issues be noted.

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 8 June 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Teresa Callaghan (Chair), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Stephen Booth, Graham Lawrence, Nick Leech, Maureen McKay, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati and Mr Geoffrey Gibbs (Independent Member).

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm

Time: End Time: 7.37pm

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

Apologies were received from Councillor John Gardner.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor John Gardner be appointed as a Vice-Chair for the Committee for the Municipal year 2021/22.

3 **MINUTES - 24 MARCH 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on Wednesday 24 March 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference.

5 **2019/20 EXTERNAL AUDIT OF SBC ACCOUNTS - PROGRESS**

Robert Garnett from Ernest & Young (E&Y) provided an update to Members on the External Audit of accounts for 2019/2020. He advised Members that the Audit of accounts for 2019/20 had not been concluded yet. He explained that he was liaising closely with the Council officers to reach a conclusion.

He informed Members that there were several areas being reviewed, such as Asset Valuations, Capital and financial statements, and that it was a complicated matter.

The independent co-opted Member Geoffrey Gibbs was concerned that the delay had put pressure on the staff and on the budget, and further delay could put the

Council's reputation in question.

Strategic Director (CF) explained that Covid-19 had impacted upon the service, however, progress had been made, and officers were working together with E&Y to bring this to a conclusion and present it to the Committee.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the verbal update on External Audit accounts for 2019/20 be noted.

6 **ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT AND ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

The SIAS Client Audit Manager updated Members on the Annual Assurance Statement and on the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2020/21. He advised Members that based on the internal audit work undertaken for 2020/21; the overall opinion on financial systems and non-financial systems was of satisfactory assurance. He explained that the Progress report contained the summary of work currently being undertaken by the Shared Internal Audit Service.

The following was outlined for Members of the Audit Committee:

- Overview of the Internal Audit Activity for 2020/21;
- Performance of the Internal Audit Service in 2020/21; targets dates were met;
- The SIAS Audit Charter annual review did not result in any fundamental changes;
- The external quality assessment started and would take approximately two weeks and the report would be presented to SIAS Board meeting on 23 June 2021;
- The targets set by the SIAS Board for the internal Audit performance 2020/21, were largely met and were positive.

Members were assured on card payment compliance. The Council reviewed different ways of accepting payment and where it could, would encourage automatic payments. The Council was currently looking to replace the software system for payments and join East Herts Council for a shared service.

In response to a question, the SIAS Client Audit Manager advised Members that the Council's strategic Covid19 response was scheduled for 2021/22 Audit Plan. The audit would cover pandemic related areas, such as business rate. Members would be presented with the outcome.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the Annual Assurance Statement for the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2020/21 be noted.
- That the result of the self-assessment required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards be noted.

- That the SIAS Audit Charter be approved.
- That the scope and resources for internal audit were not subject to inappropriate limitations in 2020/21.

7 **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020/21 AND LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

The Senior Performance and Resilience Officer presented Annual Governance Statement and Local Code of Corporate Governance for 2020/21. She advised Members on the content of the Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21 and on the changes to the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance.

As a result of Covid-19, the timeline for draft Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21 publication was extended. She explained that it would now be published by the end of July, subject to any further changes and recommendations by the Committee. It would be approved by the Statement of Account Committee in due course.

The planned improvement activity for Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22 were summarised in the officer report. Eight actions were carried over from 2020/21, although there had been activities taken place on those actions, but because of their nature, they were long standing items which would be resolved in a slower pace. Four new actions have been identified, including the Transformation Programme.

She further explained that the Local Code of Corporate Governance had recently been reviewed and was not significantly changed. She provided the following updates on Local Code of Corporate Governance:

- Addition of the New Anti-Bribery Policy and new Anti-Money Laundering Policy;
- Deletion of reference to Community Strategy;
- Inclusion of reference to the Council's Co-operative inclusive Economy Charter, reference to Statement of Community Involvement;
- Added new shared procurement Service with East Herts District Council and Hertsmere Borough Council;
- Inclusion of reference to Co-operative and Insourcing Strategy and reference to Council's Health and Safety governance structure.

In response to series of questions, the Strategic Director (CF) and Senior Performance and Resilience Officer provided the following responses:

- Statement of Community involvement was a statutory requirement and was not linked to the Community Strategy;
- The work for the Residents Survey was currently undertaken, and would be carried out by an external organisation;
- The Council House Survey and the Residents Survey would be carried out together;
- Both surveys would be promoted through social and printed media.

The Senior Performance and Resilience Officer advised Members that key performance indicators and outcomes were reported quarterly to Executive meetings and overview of the Audit Committee was also taken in to account.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the changes to the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance be approved.
- That the Annual Governance Statement be recommended by the Audit Committee to the Statement of Accounts Committee.

8 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

9 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

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

2. That Members considered the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

10 **PART II MINUTES - AUDIT COMMITTEE - 24 MARCH 2021**

Noted.

11 **STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

The Senior Performance and Resilience Officer provided an update in relation to the Strategic Risk Register.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the latest Strategic Risk Register be noted.
- That the development on risk management issues be noted.

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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