



## ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 17 January 2023

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Contact: Lisa Jerome 01438 242203

committees@stevenage.gov.uk

Members: Councillors: R Broom (Chair), A Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Ashley-Wren, S Booth, A Brown, J Brown, M Downing, B Facey, C Parris and L Rossati

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### AGENDA

#### PART 1

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

2. **MINUTES - 15 DECEMBER 2022**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Environment and Economy Select Committee meeting held on 15 December 2022.

Pages 3 – 10

3. **FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY**

To consider the final report and recommendations of the Committee's review of the Council's response to the Climate Emergency. The report has been amended from the draft report that Members considered in December based on the comments that Members raised at the meeting.

Pages 11 – 26

4. **COST OF LIVING SCRUTINY REVIEW**

To receive a presentation from Ben Threadgold, SBC Interim Head of Policy and Communities and Daryl Jedowski, SBC Corporate Policy and Research Officer on the work that SBC and partners have been undertaking to respond to the Cost-of-Living Crisis, with a focus for the meeting on the impact on local residents.

In addition to the officer presentation there will be an opportunity to interview the above SBC officers as well as Charlotte Blizzard-Welch, CEO Stevenage Citizens Advice and SBC officer Gemma Maret, Co-operative Neighbourhoods

Programme Manager regarding warm spaces.

A copy of the report provided to the Executive in December 2022 on the Cost-of-Living Crisis Response is attached as a useful background document outlining the work that the Council and partners are undertaking.

Pages 27 – 44

**5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

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

**6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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.

**7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

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

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 15 December 2022

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair) (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Jim Brown, Michael Downing, Bret Facey, Claire Parris and Loraine Rossati

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 7.18pm

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

### 2 MINUTES - 17 NOVEMBER 2022

It was **RESOLVED**: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 17 November 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

### 3 DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT - COST OF LIVING SCRUTINY REVIEW

A verbal presentation was given, which included:

- The draft scoping document should be considered for a scrutiny review of the cost-of-living crisis.
- There would be a focus on three elements of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis over three themed Committee meetings, these were:
  - Residents – exploring the impact on different demographics (January 2023).
  - Businesses – especially small to medium sized enterprises (SME's) highlighting energy crisis for businesses, material cost inflation, business rates (February 2023).
  - Council Services (March 2023).
- It was hoped by January that a range of people would be available to discuss their views.
- There had been discussion at a recent Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting about the effect on the Council, and this would be reviewed at the March 2023 Select Committee meeting.

The following points were made by a Member:

- The scoping document referenced SBC Lead contributors to the review, but some of the people mentioned were not SBC employees or Members, including the children centres that aren't run by SBC but were crucial.
- Vulnerable people were an important demographic group.
- Food banks weren't included on the report.

The Chair responded and agreed that children centres were crucial as they are not just for children but also had a wider social aspect. He also agreed that food banks were important, and the Council needed to concentrate on agencies that worked on cost-of-living issues. If it was necessary, this could be revisited later in the year.

A Member agreed that the work would provide a snapshot, but there was a need to act more quickly than in a space of a year. Obtaining figures for the number of those on benefits would be helpful.

The Chair commented that council tax is an indicator of hardship if people were struggling to pay. The Citizens Advice team would help the review as they would be able to share data that could be used as a comparable metric. The January Committee would be a session with 3 agencies in an hour and a half. It was important that the 3 agencies were afforded an appropriate amount of time to provide their views.

The following points were made by a Member:

- Critical areas need to be looked at first.
- Interest rates had gone up to 3.5%. There was concern about people paying rents and there was a shortage of rented properties in the town. There was a lot of pressure on home buyers and home renters.
- Talking to Human Resources would be useful but there was also a need to talk to unions and staff circles to pick up real experiences.
- A foodbank did not form part of the review, but there are other ground level organisations that could be involved in the review.

The Chair responded that there were other agencies out there, for example Spruce, the furniture recycling group who were doing excellent work in the community.

A Member commented that people with mortgages who had bought at the top of the market would likely have a fixed rate, so there was some stability.

A Member noted that schools would be a good place to look at as they tended to pick up on that demographic. People that worked in schools, such as teaching assistants, did not tend to qualify for universal credit but didn't earn enough to fully support themselves.

The Chair stated that these issues could be asked to the Citizens Advice team to get more information on. This review needed to focus on local issues. All Members had strong views on national topics, such as the welfare system, but the review should be focused on what was happening in Stevenage and what can be done locally.

A Member referred to the Equality Act and that different groups were being affected differently.

The Chair agreed that it was important to find out what was happening within the community. Further aspects like this could be reviewed later in the year.

A Member commented that summer 2023 would be an appropriate time to review the work on cost of living.

A Member commented that prices were not going down and wages weren't going up at the same rate of inflation. There would be a difference between earnings and outgoings for the foreseeable future. The Council needed to do winter planning for next winter in the summer of 2023, like colleagues in the Health service do.

#### 4 **DRAFT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY**

A verbal presentation was given, which included:

- The draft report and recommendations should be considered of the Environment and Economy Select Committee's review of the Council's response to the climate emergency.
- The report was a comprehensive record of what the Committee had covered, including most recently the conversations with HCC and the Youth Council.
- The possibility of future opportunities to involve Rothampstead Research in Harpenden on food growth and agriculture.

A Member commented that there needed to be at least one item on climate change at each Select Committee meeting to track the review's progress.

A Member asked when the review would next be looked at in 2023. It should be mentioned in the report that the Climate Change Act was in 1998 and the Council's first strategy was in 2010. It was good that there was now some data on CO2 emissions being quoted, but the annual results should be tracked so that people in the future could see what had happened.

The Chair agreed that there should be metrics that the review could readily look at.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that many Members had been involved in the review but not the overall document. It was hoped that the final report would be agreed at the January 2023 Committee meeting. This would then be submitted to the relevant Portfolio Holders, including the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change and the new Leader for a response within the statutory 2-month period. In June/July 2023 the Committee could look at what progress had been made on the recommendations. The 2018 baseline figures would be good to have in a visual format.

The Lead Officer for Climate Change responded that the data was published by the UK Government data. This data goes back to 2005. In the last climate change report, there was a graph from 2005-2020 and there was also a graph for the

contribution from different sectors. Transport data related to all vehicles. Industry, domestic and private was mainly due to energy consumption. Future reports could have further information in the footnotes and labels to make it easier to read. The Chair agreed that this would be a good idea.

A Member commented that there were concerns about how much the Council was committed to the Climate Change emergency. COVID had been an emergency, but climate change seemed a bit theoretical to some people. Now people were taking it more seriously. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change had expressed views of it not being taken seriously enough, but things are now progressing. Another concern was public involvement. There was a group of people who had always been interested in the climate emergency, but there were others who were sceptical. It still wasn't something people saw as an emergency. The Chair agreed that this should be measured in some way.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the annual report to the Executive gave progress compared to the baseline figures.

A Member suggested that there should be a graph year to year to show this.

The Lead Officer for Climate Change responded that an online platform was currently being trialled to be constantly updated on climate change progress. It would be interactive and would hopefully be launched early next year. This would be available internally and externally.

A Member commented that the Council needed to make climate change real to people and show what progress had been made. There were different approaches to affect people's behaviour and these had to be realistic. Climate change sometimes disappeared from the public's consciousness and seemed quite theoretical.

A Member commented that climate change was essential to planning development. The Local Plan would be crucial to this. The Scrutiny Office stated that there was a paragraph in the report that dealt with the importance of the Local Plan.

The Chair agreed that climate change needed to be presented in a way that people felt they could engage with.

A Member agreed that engaging with people was important but commented that the Council had been talking to a relatively small amount of the population about this. From the views of a wider cross-section of the public, such as younger people, there was an impatience for action.

A Member raised points including:

- Litter picking and biodiversity was great and led to a better environment but it didn't lead to CO2 reduction or to reducing climate change.
- There was reference to future standards of housing, but future land use was missing from the paper. If the Council continued to approve planning applications – putting things in remote retail places and separating these from where people work and live, then this would be generating more transport journeys and emissions.

The Chair mentioned that Stevenage was a quite compact urban area and shorter journeys were easier than in rural areas, but looking at planning use could be useful as there might be ways to make shorter journeys easier for people.

A Member commented that he did not agree with the Oxford approach of dividing the town up into '15-minute neighbourhoods'.

A Member commented that he failed to see the link between litter picking and biodiversity. Litter picking was more of a visual activity and was unsure how this affected biodiversity. He also mentioned that he understood that electric buses would contribute to 70% of the Council's aim to achieve net carbon zero by 2030.

A Member commented that the buses were not very reliable, which was probably why people use their cars more.

Another Member mentioned that there was a lack of bus drivers, and that more drivers were needed to deliver a proper service.

The Chair responded to the comment regarding biodiversity and stated that Stevenage was an exemplar for biodiversity and that biodiversity does matter and hoped that other Councils saw the work that had been done. Without it the Council would be behind on climate change.

A Member commented that the electric buses may contribute 70% carbon reduction, but did not contribute to 70% of our traffic. When it came to traffic and transportation, there needed to be dialogue with the County Council, as a lot of issues were related to school journeys and there needed to be a focus on children walking or cycling to school.

A Member commented that the review document would evolve as more was learnt.

A Member made some comments which included:

- There was concern around the use of words in the report and the missed opportunities if the Council was not proactive. The report was passive in the way it had been presented.
- Engagement and consultation were not necessarily the best way forward and the Council should use co-production with anyone who was interested in solving climate change problems to design and deliver solutions. The power of the community and voluntary sectors needed to be harnessed to deliver solutions together.
- The co-production approach could be used to help people reduce energy costs. By helping people to reduce energy costs this should reflect on changing behaviours.
- In respect of the Council's plan for the fleet transformation, what was the time period and how much would it cost?
- The Council should assist people in applying for grants to start a repairs café.

The Chair agreed that people needed support from the Council and its community team with grant applications. The Council needed to keep learning about and

understanding climate change and this would need to be built into the Council and Member training programme.

The Lead Officer for Climate Change responded that the full climate change data from 2018/2019/2020 could be shared.

A number of Members commented on the state of the cycle paths in Stevenage. During bad weather the roads were made safe to use but often the cycle paths were not cleared. SBC was responsible for cleaning them and HCC was responsible for maintaining them.

The Chair agreed that some cycle paths were not accessible but there were a lot of bikes at the train station every morning so they were being used quite a bit. This was the same for schools.

A Member suggested that it would be interesting to get the data from all secondary schools on bike use.

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that there had been a scrutiny cycling review in 2010.

A Member mentioned that a significant number of people were working from home and so were not travelling to work as frequently as in the past. However, this could be offset by the fact that heating homes all day would be using increased energy from fossil fuels.

The Lead Officer for Climate Change responded to a few comments made by Members which included:

- Biodiversity was important in keeping the circle alive and trees were very important in taking up carbon. It was relevant to the climate change agenda as maintaining a healthy environment would help take up carbon.
- She clarified that the EV buses would save up to 1700 tonnes of carbon emissions.
- There was work underway to produce a plan of what vehicles would need to be replaced for the Councils vehicle fleet. The plan would include timescales and costs.
- It was important to find out why statistics were going up or down, but there were other statistics and these would be correlated to and find out why there were changes in carbon emissions.

A Member stated that there was a downside to electric vehicles, in terms of mileage. Diesel buses often travelled about 1000 miles a day, and electric were unable to cope with this level of mileage. The use of hydrogen-powered vehicles could be investigated.

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members of a pilot happening in Aberdeen of electric vehicles and the data from this would be interesting.

A Member commented that hydrogen vehicles would still produce carbon emissions. Consideration could be given to other forms of transportation, such as trams.

It was **RESOLVED**: That the recommendations set out in the report be agreed, and



the comments made by Members be taken on board by officers in the ongoing Climate Change Review.

5 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was none.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

**CHAIR**

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**PART I**  
**Release to Press**



Agenda  
Item:

**Meeting:** ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area: Lead Portfolio Area – Environment & Climate Change/All Portfolio Areas

**Date:** 17 JANUARY 2023

## **FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY**

Author – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332

Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332

Contributors – Councillor Rob Broom, Chair of Environment & Economy Select Committee; Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawed, Lead Officer, Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan

### **1 PURPOSE**

1.1 To consider the final report and recommendations of the Environment & Economy Select Committee Scrutiny review into the Council's response to the Climate Emergency.

### **2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED**

2.1 In 2019 the Council along with other local authorities declared a climate emergency. The then Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee, Cllr Michael Downing on 22 June 2021 invited the committee to make this its main review for 2021/22 and this was agreed by the Select Committee.

2.2 Due to the scope and size of the review it has been conducted over 2 municipal years.

#### **2.3 Scope and Focus of the review**

2.3.1 The Committee met on 4 and 24 October 2021 [Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 21 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#) to agree the scope for the review, and it agreed should consider the following areas:

- How are the public engaged in this project?
- Establish how the funding to support measures are being implemented to mainstream this work?
- Compare with other local authorities of a similar size and demographic to see how the plans look?

- Establish what equalities and diversity measures will be considered for this project?
- What does the Council need to do that it currently isn't doing that will help mainstream a climate emergency approach to its day-to-day practises?
- What should Council's be doing to lead on Climate Change?

## 2.4 Process of the review

2.4.1 The Committee met formally on 11 occasions over the two years in 2021 and 2022 and informally on 3 occasions to undertake the review and received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- Monday 4 October 2021, received an officer presentation and considered the scoping document
- Thursday 21 October 2021, interview with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, Cllr John Gardner and updated scoping document
- Thursday 18 November 2021, interview with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe; HEART environmental community group and considering a mapping exercise document
- Monday 10 January 2022, interview with the Director of the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab, Professor Lubo Jankovic; Members mind mapping and quick wins; notes from a COP26 seminar for local government and notes from a post COP26 LGiU seminar
- Monday 17 January 2022 informal meeting of E&E Members on Zoom to look at possible long term strategic recommendations and short-term quick wins from the review
- Thursday 3 March 2022, informal meeting of the Committee to interview the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas
- Wednesday 23 March 2022, interim report and recommendations of the Select Committee
- Thursday 23 June 2022, consider the University of Hertfordshire's Zero Carbon Lab report providing theoretical carbon reduction measures which could help the Council reach its net zero ambitions
- Wednesday 13 July 2022, interview with the Leader of the Council, Cllr Sharon Taylor and Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT, Cllr Joan Lloyd
- Tuesday 22 September 2022, interview with the new Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller
- Thursday 20 October 2022, interviews with the Executive Portfolio Holders for Culture, Leisure, Children and Young People, Cllr Richard Henry; Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, Cllr Sandra Barr; and Executive Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Equalities, Health and Older People and updates on tree policy and recycling

- Monday 24 October 2022, informal meeting of the Committee to interview Friends of the Earth, Peter Foord and Andy Holtham
- Wednesday 16 November 2022, representatives of the Committee met Members of the Young People’s Climate Change Committee (a sub-group of the Youth Council) to engage with young people re climate change
- Thursday 17 November 2022, interviews with HCC Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cllr Eric Buckmaster and Chair of the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership, Cllr Graham McAndrew, and with HCC Head of Sustainability, Julie Greaves and Lead Officer for Climate Change, East of England LGA, Matt Partridge

2.4.2 The review provided an interim report and recommendations on 23 March 2022 based on the work the committee had undertaken from October 2021 to March 2022 including sessions with three of the Executive Portfolio areas, HEART community group and the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab.

2.4.3 The interim report of the Committee agreed 23 specific recommendations under areas such as:

- Mainstreaming of climate change activity including protection in the Council budget
- Creation of a full-time post to lead on climate change
- Decarbonising the housing stock
- Improved resident engagement
- Encouraging local, small scale, micro-ward events that can focus resident’s involvement in green environmental projects
- Improved recycling rates
- Increased tree planting to meet the 2% gap in the Stevenage tree canopy
- Moving to strengthen local plan that has climate change as its core
- Transport – promotion of EV and modal shift
- Improved performance reporting for progress against the baseline figure and milestones around projects
- Improved communications channels
- Promotion of 20 Minute Neighbourhoods

### **3 REVIEW FINDINGS**

#### **3.1 Conclusions of the Environment & Economy Select Committee**

3.1.1 In addition to the Committee’s interim report and based on the input provided to Members conducting the review the Committee have made the following conclusions:

##### **3.1.2 Progress achieved since declaring a climate emergency**

- 3.1.3 Since declaring a climate emergency progress has been made in the following areas:
- 3.1.4 **Establishing a robust base line figure for the town's carbon footprint.**  
As part of the review the Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator, David Thorogood, presented to Members CO2 emission data for Stevenage, which showed a spread of the carbon footprint by sector. Transport (34%) produced the biggest CO2 emission followed by the domestic (28%), commercial (18%), industry (13%) and public sector (7%). In fact, transport and domestic emissions combined were almost 2 thirds of the overall emissions for the area (64%), so this provided Members with a clear idea about where the focus of all partners should be regarding reducing the areas carbon footprint. The percentage for transport emissions are accounting emissions from all vehicles on A roads and minor roads (the full set includes main roads too), railways and flights. For Industry, Domestic and Private, the above percentages are referring to their energy consumption, i.e. electricity, gas and other solid fuels. Other sectors included in the overall emissions inventory are waste management, agriculture and the net emissions from land use (i.e. carbon uptake by vegetations).
- 3.1.4.1 The way progress against the 2018 baseline figure is measured as part of the annual report update on Climate Change to the Executive and the way it is more widely publicised needs to be thought through so that this is clearly described to show what progress is being made each year and understood by officers, Members and by the public. These findings should be subjected to an annual audit process, which is perhaps built into the work of the audit committee and subjected to scrutiny by members on an annual basis.
- 3.1.4.2 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review at its meeting on 15 December 2022, Environment and Economy Select Committee Members recommended that the report should reference the 1998 UK Climate Change Act, which followed the first Conference of the Parties (COP) held in 1995 in Berlin, and the Council's 1st Climate Change Strategy some 15 years later, which was established in 2010, to show that the climate change challenge has been a known issue for a long time.
- 3.1.4.3 The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that the 2050 target within the Climate Change Act was amended in 2019. The target changed from at least 80% reduction from 1990 levels to net zero by 2050. This might have prompted taking actions at a local level. Veronica has since clarified the way the carbon dioxide emissions were estimated within the scope of local authority in the SBC baseline year 2018 was 350 kt. Industry and commercial combined (42%, including the electricity and gas consumption, solid fuels burn and installations but excluding large industrial sites) followed by domestic (31%, including the electricity and gas consumption and solid fuels burn), and transport (27%, including emissions from A roads, minor roads and combustion of lubricants but excluding railways and motorways).

- 3.1.5 **Appointment of a lead Climate Change Officer.** The appointment of this post and budget provision for a new post of Head of Climate Change Service has shown real commitment to taking a lead and mainstreaming climate change activity. The hope is that this post will enable a framework for working within SBC, which enables climate impacts to be assessed as a routine part of council working, and that SBCs sustainability goals become a factor in the appraisal process of the organisation.
- 3.1.6 **Leading on Biodiversity.** Stevenage is one of the leading authorities in Hertfordshire on promoting biodiversity and has been praised by Friends of the Earth for its Collaborative work with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust as a model for other council to adopt. The hope is that SBCs expertise in this area is disseminated via HCCSP and other county wide forums. However, Stevenage and other authorities, need to work hard to address the depletion of native species and plant types in Hertfordshire in recent years.
- 3.1.7 **Improved energy efficiency of its housing stock.** Having a key focus on improving the energy performance of its housing stock with a target to reach an EPC rating of C or better by 2030 and the aspiration to make new build net zero by 2030, has been welcomed by Friends of the Earth who agree with SBC's focus on home insulation. Progress in this area has started slowly, and this is largely due to only limited amounts of funding available to local authorities by way of competitive bids to government funds bidding against other authorities. The pace of change is comparable to other authorities with a housing stock or for any social landlord. There will be a requirement for greater funding streams or funding options being made available from central government to meet the level of investment that is required.
- 3.1.8 **Following Industry wide local government best practice.** The Scrutiny Officer attended a post COP26 local government seminar hosted by the LGiU, at which advice was given about how local government can best influence residents and business in its area. The advice is to work collaboratively and be science led. On both these issues the Council is on the right path. SBC is an active member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership and Matt Partridge is the lead CEO for climate change in Hertfordshire and represents the Herts Chief Exec Group at the HCCSP executive meetings and represents the County at the East of England LGA Climate Change Forum. The authority also has dialogue with leading environmental groups in the area including Friends of the Earth and HEART. The work that the Council is doing in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab gives a sound scientific basis to provide leadership. This work continues through the HSCCP on research about lower carbon buildings.
- 3.1.9 **Tree Planting** - The Council's Climate Change Strategy (September 2020) has a target plan to plant 2,000 250 trees a year by 2030 – equivalent to 200 trees per year for ten years. However, current budget only enables the

planting of 80-100 standard trees (2-3m tall) per year. In 2022/23 officers are working with schools, volunteers and residents to plant around 4,000 tree whips (60-100cm tall) to create a new community woodland. All trees require a level of care and maintenance to give them the best chance of survival and long-term establishment. Standard trees make a quicker impact due to their size and are more suitable for specimen planting in open spaces and residential areas, but will require a high level care (through provision of and future checking of stakes & ties, and watering) for at least the first three years after planting. Whip planting is more suitable for hedgerow and woodland planting, but due to their smaller size take longer to make a visual impact. They don't require the same high level of maintenance as standard trees. Members were made aware of the rate of sequestration of carbon that trees and grasslands have to absorb carbon, which is greater than any other measure. However, grasslands and ponds also help to sequester carbon and it is important to provide a matrix of habitats in order to support the widest benefits to biodiversity as well as mitigating the impact of climate change.

3.1.9.1 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review, Environment and Economy Select Committee Members commented that although they see tree planting as an important feature in combating climate change on a global scale it is not something that can be done at sufficient scale in Stevenage to significantly reduce the areas carbon footprint, but maintaining a healthy tree stock and canopy is important for the carbon sequestration they offer as well as for biodiversity and for offering shade, an important measure to adapt to the increased air temperature in the summer.

3.1.10 **Aspirational target of Net Zero by 2030 for the area of Stevenage**

Members are of the view that having the target of being net zero by 2030 for the area of Stevenage is very challenging and at this stage it would be more realistic to say that the Council's carbon footprint will be net zero by 2030 but the whole area will be harder to achieve. However, having a tough target will encourage all partners to keep its focus and aim on meeting it. If a less ambitious target of net zero by 2050, as is the government's national target, will push off any urgency into the distance and would very much slow progress.

3.1.11 **Change of working practises since the pandemic** A change to the way work is carried out with an increase in home working has had an impact with reduced travel from outside of Stevenage into the town. However, it is worth noting that the emissions of working from home are included within the greenhouse gas protocols under scope 3 (which are the same category as staff commuting) and that some of the emission sources would be transferred. However, it is hard to know the impact (either positive or negative) as the carbon emissions from commuting were not included in the SBC baseline calculation. In time, hybrid working could lead to a smaller office space being required, which would in turn give a lower carbon footprint arising from the gas and electricity consumption in the office (scope 1 and 2). However, the ability of all staff to work from home is not equal so there is a



limit to the benefits that hybrid working can achieve. The town centre regeneration will deliver a public service hub, and this represents an opportunity for SBC to deliver a fully sustainable, low carbon building, which offers efficient use of space and energy.

## 3.2 **Challenges**

### 3.2.1 Two aspects – SBC carbon footprint and town wide emissions

3.2.2 **Pathway to 2030 and how to measure progress** – A critique of the Council's Climate Change strategy from Friends of the Earth is that there is no clear targets or pathway to see how Stevenage gets from where it is now, to net zero by 2030. Members have echoed this and have asked for an easy to follow 'flightpath' that can show progress year on year. There is a need for interim targets or other ways to measure progress such as carbon budgets. Linked to this critique, Members of the Select Committee had earlier in the review suggested that the Executive and Strategic Leadership Team consider how to represent the progress of the strategy by way of a Fishbone chart or Gantt chart with key target lines and KPIs, which would make it possible for Members and for the public to see how the Council is working towards its target for net zero by 2030.

3.2.2.1 The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that the online platform will be used to plan, track, measure and publish the Council's climate action plan. The lead officer for each action will be able to update the progress of their actions in real time and improve the transparency of the progression of individual action to both internal and external stakeholders. Some of the actions will also be connected to quantifiable metrics and the platform will enable visualising of those metrics. Officers are aiming to launch the platform in Feb 2023.

3.2.3 **Pace** – A further critique from Friends of the Earth has been around the pace the Council is addressing climate change, they recognised that it is hard for Councils to move quickly, but the 2008 Climate Change Act was made legislation 14 years ago. It could be argued that nationally most of those years have been a missed opportunity and could be called lost years up to 2019 when the Council declared a climate emergency. Friends of the Earth challenged the Council if it is really being treated as an emergency? This links to the question that the former Chair of the Committee consistently raised about if the issue was truly being treated as an emergency. The Council needs to ramp up the pace to get to net zero for the town by 2030.

3.2.4 **Travel** – Within the Council's existing travel strategy there are good initiatives to decarbonise taxis and buses which is a good plan, but the policy is less strong on reducing emissions from cars such as trying to get people out of cars for short journeys and to use public transport and other modes of zero carbon active travel such as cycling and walking. Due consideration needs to be given to the promotion of and increasing the use of the excellent cycle path network

in Stevenage. Members recognise that for the majority of local residents the option of converting from fossil fuel to EV is prohibitively expensive.

3.2.4.1 Hertfordshire County Council had partnered with Arriva, the bus operator in Stevenage, and supported by Stevenage Borough Council to bid for the Government Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme. Acknowledging the bus fleet in Stevenage is an aged fleet, with the average age being around 11 years, there is an opportunity for the fleet to be replaced by a zero-emission alternative. The most suitable solution to match the duty cycle requirements at Stevenage is battery electric single deckers. The success of the bid will deliver 27 new electric buses in Stevenage by 2024. It is estimated to remove 1,700 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year, as well as improving the local air quality and cutting down on noise.

3.2.4.2 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the report should make more of the cycling network in the town. Stevenage has an excellent cycle infrastructure, but the challenge is getting more people to use it. SBC Stevenage Direct Services cleanse the cycle network, but the maintenance is the responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council which is a challenge as the Council can request interventions from HCC but has no control over them or the network. Members have suggested that officers ask secondary schools in the town what their numbers are for students cycling to school? Members were also keen to find out what the numbers are for cyclists who use the rail station? Members and officers are keen to promote Active Travel, with other interested groups and agencies in the town.

3.2.5 **Improve Public Engagement** – The annual report on Climate Change has identified this as an area for focus with work with residents. The initial work with the Citizen's Panel was good but this was not followed up in a timely way so lost momentum. At this stage this is an area that needs development. Members are aware that the new Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller, is in the process of changing this approach to improve the current position with two levels of engagement with environmental expert activists in one reference group and ordinary members of the public, acting as a sounding board to policies. The opportunity for detailed consultation on practical, small scale project (recycle rates in flat blocks) (Grey water capture at neighbourhood centres to water flower beds) should not be lost.

3.2.5.1 Commenting on the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review in December 2022, Members recommended that the report should say that more needs to be done with public engagement on this issue, as not enough progress has been made on this yet and Scrutiny Members wished to see progress using a co-production model with interested residents, businesses, and the voluntary sector. The Assistant Director Planning and Regulatory has stated that this is the approach that the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change has embarked upon with the plans for Topic Reference Groups and Topic Panel Groups which should address the public engagement deficit in this area.

3.2.6 **Behaviour change** - This is an area local government can champion, and it is cost neutral to change behaviour. For individuals there is a huge up-front cost to mitigations like solar panels, Electric Vehicles, and air source heat pumps but no up-front investment needed to change behaviours. Councils could do much more here to promote eating less meat, flying less, and cycling and walking more. There will be opportunities to link up with the HCC Behaviour Change unit to work together on this. A consequence of the extreme rise in energy costs in 2022 has made the public look at their domestic energy consumption, so this links with the campaign to get households to lower their thermostats by 2 degrees. If this habit becomes established behaviour even when the unit price of energy eventually decreases, then the adjustment may become a permanent feature for some households. ([Public Pack](#))[HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE UNIT PRESENTATION Agenda Supplement for Cabinet Panel on the Environment, 06/07/2021 19:30 \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

3.2.6.1 Harnessing public behaviour change is not easy to achieve, as a 2021 Kantar Public survey of 10 countries (including the UK, Germany, New Zealand and the US) showed that, as part of this survey, although 78% of Europeans consider climate change as a very serious problem, this only translates into the mid 30% taking direct action to change behaviour such as eat less meat and use alternative modes of transport and overall 46% of respondents feeling that there was no real need for them to change their personal habits [PUBLIC Journal 04 \(turtl.co\)](#)

3.2.6.2 Commenting on the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review in December 2022, Members suggested that that there was a danger of the Council sounding sanctimonious, the best way to change behaviour is to provide a benefit in kind in some form e.g. a cost saving on energy or something similar to incentivise behaviour change so that residents can own their own actions. The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that the Council is working with other councils within Hertfordshire under the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) leadership on Behaviour Change. The strategic Behaviour Change Action Plan has set out 15 actions working towards raising awareness of the values of climate actions, encouraging sustainable choices, cross-sector campaign supporting sustainable development, modal shift and linking it with air quality and health.

3.2.7 **Helping SME's** – SBC are providing support to the Small to Medium Enterprises in the area. Big businesses based in the area are leading on climate change and have set ambitious targets to be net zero by 2030. SME's will find the journey to net zero far more challenging as they have competing priorities in the cost of living/energy crisis. SME's lack the capacity and expertise to progress on climate change, but SBC can provide support with networking, sharing knowledge and joint bids.

3.2.8 **Strengthening sustainability through the Local Plan** - The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) informed the review that one of the

Council's aspirations was to include sustainability requirements in all its planning policy measures. This can only happen in an enforceable way once it is in an early version of the next Local Plan. In relation to major planning developments approved by the Council, where the biodiversity net gain could not be achieved by the developer, an amount would be charged to the developer which the Council would then use towards area wide biodiversity purposes. When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the report should reference land use which was missing from report. Given that 34% of the area's CO2 emissions are from transport Members have suggested that the Council should do all it can to make amenities local for residents. The Assistant Director, Planning and Regulatory has stated that insulation is a building control function, however the review of the local plan in 2023 will examine how the Council can be use land use planning to reduce carbon emissions of both new and existing residents.

3.2.9 **Waste and recycling** – The review supported the input received from officers regarding developments with waste and recycling and wishes to promote using and consuming less as the principal focus for waste and recycling followed by reusing including promoting the use of clothes banks and upcycling of clothes and household goods. A growing model in this regard are Repair Cafés. Members are keen to support a repair café in the town should residents in Stevenage be inclined to start one.

3.2.9.1 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the report should go further, and that the Council should help any residents that wish to start up a repair café in the town, by way of some pump prime funds from the Executive Portfolio Holder for Climate Change “Dragons Den” style funding of community led climate change initiatives. Officers have said that there could be capacity to host a repair café or similar in the indoor market.

3.2.10 **Training** - The Committee recommends the creation of a climate change training package for members, and additional training for senior officers, on climate change mitigations and adaption. This will help support future decision makers who are well informed in all aspects of the councils' operations, and the bearing climate change mitigation and adaption may have on them.

3.2.10.1 The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that she has started a conversation with Human Resources and is now in discussion regarding rolling out an “Introduction to climate change” to all new starter staff as part of their corporate induction. The Climate Change Lead Officer has also suggested that some senior officers should attend climate change risk and adaptation training that is organised by Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Panel (HCCSP) in early 2023.

3.2.11 **Review mapping document** – Given the size and scope of the review Members used a mapping document through out the review process (see the latest iteration which was presented to the 17 November 2022 meeting -

[https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s33020/Mapping\\_exercise\\_for\\_EESC - Climate Change Emergency Review - Update for 17 Nov 2022 EESC.pdf](https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s33020/Mapping_exercise_for_EESC_-_Climate_Change_Emergency_Review_-_Update_for_17_Nov_2022_EESC.pdf)

There were a few areas that the review has not been able to completely consider highlighted in the document and are as follows:

- Engage with E&N Hertfordshire NHS Trust re the plans for the Lister Hospital. Contact has now been made with Claudia Montgomery, Deputy Director Estates and Facilities for the E&N Hertfordshire NHS Trust, with a view for SBC's Lead Climate Change Officer and colleagues to meet and to start a dialogue with them to understand what their baseline year is and what the Trust's approach is to measuring their carbon footprint. In time it is hoped that this dialogue will provide opportunities to discuss any climate adaptation actions and get a better understanding of how E&NH NHS Trust are planning to decarbonise their fleet and supply chains.
- Make links to tenant and leaseholder representative groups. Due to the changes in the governance and engagement model it has not been possible so far to make contact with these groups.
- Although some contact with young people has been made with a small sub-group of the E&E Select Committee and a young people's Climate Change Group linked to the Youth Mayor and Youth Council, limited progress was made in this area. The Committee will look to the Executive Portfolio Holder covering Children and Young People to take a lead in this area and report back progress to the Committee at a later date.

### 3.3 **Main conclusions**

#### 3.3.1 **SBC focus**

3.3.2 **Decarbonising the housing stock** - As demonstrated in the paragraphs above there has been good progress shown since declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019 but unless there is serious funding made available by the government then SBC will not deal with its main challenge of funding £240Million decarbonising its housing stock of 8,000 properties.

3.3.3 **Fleet emissions** - Tackling fleet emissions is a challenge, replacing the fleets smaller vehicles with Electric Vehicles will be possible over a period of time, but the larger vehicles and specifically the freight refuse vehicles will require a decision in the next 2 to 3 years on replacements vehicles. In this area the technology is developing with one authority in the UK operating a hydrogen fleet at Aberdeen City Council, [H2 Aberdeen | Aberdeen City Council](#) which removes close to a 1000 tonnes of CO2 a year per refuse vehicle. Lessons from this example will need to be considered. An option will need to be decided upon, but this will have significant budget implications as well as environmental considerations to factor in. It may therefore be possible in future years that a hydrogen power source for the larger freighters is possible or perhaps a hybrid option dual power source may have to be considered.

- 3.3.3.1 The Assistant Director Stevenage Direct Services has stated that this is an issue that is under review, but it is difficult to be specific regarding the financing of various options as they are susceptible to change, and officers do not know the whole policy environment yet. Officers have undertaken some financial projections on changing the fleet to electric, and there are wider considerations regarding electrical infrastructure capacity and costs too, to accommodate an increase in electrical demand.
- 3.3.3.2 The sector is also in a state of flux. For example, whilst electrical vehicles may be a reasonable alternative for smaller vehicles / vans, they are less of a viable solution for larger fleet, and alternatives such as hydrogen seem to be developing. Purchase costs currently vary enormously, e.g. a diesel refuse freighter is circa £183k an electric freighter £450k (the technology only works for 'waste' vehicles, not 'recycling' ones, as the latter draws more energy needs via the hydraulics) and hydrogen is between £500k and £800k (and these are in their infancy).
- 3.3.3.3 In the meantime, officers are looking into alternative lower-carbon fuels such as Gas to Liquid (GtL) and refined Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO). Both of these options can be used without engine modifications, and will benefit the environment through reduced CO<sub>2</sub>, however the fuel is a higher cost than diesel currently. Officers are also aiming to introduce flexible Solar PV panels onto the tops of the refuse and recycling trucks, which can save around 1,100 litres of fuel p/year. This is subject to successful capital funding approval.
- 3.3.3.4 In terms of the needs of the replacement programme for the larger ticket items of the refuse and recycling freighters these do not need to all be replaced at the same time and can be replaced over a rolling replacement schedule over the next few years with just one needing to be replaced in 2023/24, then three in 2024/25 and finally six in 2025/26.
- 3.3.4 **Greening of the Council's Estate** - The Council's estates assets are being considered in audits which will need to consider what the long-term needs for repairs and future proofing is required as well as future use and or disposal is required. The regeneration plans include the demolition of Daneshill House with a replacement building in the civic hub incorporating, health, library, museum and civic offices and council chamber. If the SG1 plans were to stall or be altered and Daneshill House is retained, then a deep retrofit would be required. Other existing buildings, such as the leisure centre and the swimming centre are inefficient and poorly insulated buildings. Therefore, the regeneration plans will have a crucial impact on how the Council develops the climate impact of its buildings. There are trade-offs between new builds with low energy needs but high carbon upfront impacts, against the carbon saving of repurposing existing buildings. This will be a consideration for the new leisure buildings as part of the Council's regeneration plans.
- 3.3.5 **Community Energy Projects** a future consideration for the Council, potentially in partnership with other local authorities, is community energy

projects. [Hotting up: the growth of district heat networks - LGiU](#) the examples given in the LGiU link are for larger unitary Council's, it is hard to find comparable examples for district councils, the most likely development would seem to be working in partnership with other districts and the County Council to explore options for similar schemes locally. [How Cambridgeshire Council is raising revenue with solar farms | Climate Action \(takeclimateaction.uk\)](#) Tempering this there is a recent example of a failed Solar Energy Company owned by Thurrock Council resulting in a £655 Million loss.

3.3.6 **Stevenage Progress** - Stevenage has clearly made some good progress in the last few years, and for a district Council of its size is showing good ambition to make a difference in its areas for climate change. Stevenage is some way behind other leading local authorities such as Bristol City Council who have been on a 20-year journey towards net zero, but this is well ahead of most authorities. [Bristol City Council: Share insights and evidence of success | Local Government Association](#)

3.3.7 **Adaptations** - The review established that due to extreme weather events linked to climate change there is already a need for adaptations to buildings and for up-to-date emergency response plans to care for older residents in Council run sheltered housing schemes. A need for an audit of all adaptations required will be a recommendation of the review.

### 3.4 **Area wide focus**

3.4.1 As well as dealing with its own carbon footprint which is estimated to be 2% of the areas CO<sub>2</sub> (or up to 10% if all of the Council's housing stock is included), the Council has a role in influencing partners, business based in the town and with residents.

3.4.2 There has been progress with the big companies in the town, but more work needs to be done to encourage SME's to make the necessary changes required.

3.4.3 Influencing behaviour change with residents is the biggest challenge to affect the area wide target. The area of behaviour change that is needed which costs little is around lifestyle issues such as eating less meat, using less resources and repairing rather than disposing and replace clothes and household gadgets and for travel encouraging families to consider flying less, and for short journeys cycling and walking more and using rail and buses for long and medium length journeys. However, as stated at 3.2.6.1 this is not an easy task to achieve given people's reluctance to make individual changes. When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the Council needs to be careful how it approaches this subject as there was a danger that the Council could appear to be sanctimonious and be taken as talking down to residents rather than providing them with easy to take up solutions.

### 3.5 **Equalities & Diversity issues**

3.5.1 The issue of equalities and diversity and the climate emergency are interlinked. Throughout the review Members have seen that there can be different impacts on protected characteristic groups, with impacts on older people becoming a concern in extreme climate change related weather events. The impact on those on low income or in receipt of benefits is also noteworthy as this group have little chance to make household interventions to lower their carbon footprint with heat pumps, insulation, solar PV and EV, and also the lifestyle changes are a challenge due to the focus being on economic and social survival. However, this does not mean that people from this demographic group are not unaware of or unable to make some lifestyle choices around climate change.

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 That the Environment & Economy Select Committee considers the findings of the review, contained within this report and the recommendations below be presented to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller; the Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawed and Lead Climate Change Officer, Veronica Chan and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report.

4.2 **SBC and area wide pathway and targets** It is recommended that clear targets and a pathway to 2030 for both SBC targets and area wide targets need to be established. It is not currently clear what the targets or pathway are to see how Stevenage gets from where it is now to 2030. The way progress against the 2018 baseline figure is measured and publicised needs to be thought through so that this is clearly described to show what progress is being made each year and understood by officers, Members and by the public.

4.3 **Pace** Is the climate emergency really being treated as an emergency? It is recommended that there is a need to ramp up the pace to get to net zero for the town by 2030. Members accept there are challenges around funding but where it sits in corporate priorities is an area that is a decision for the authority. Members will be looking to see how the pace is picked up leading to 2030.

4.4 **Adaptations** The review established that due to extreme weather events linked to climate change there is already a need for adaptations to buildings and for up-to-date emergency response plans to care for older residents in sheltered housing schemes. It is recommended that there be an audit of all adaptations required across the Council.

4.5 **Behaviour Change** It is recommended that officers from SBC link up with officers from the HCC Behaviour Change unit to work together on behaviour change initiatives.

4.6 **Future review** It has been recommended by the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee that the issue of the climate emergency



should be under regular review by the Committee and that a progress report should be brought back to the committee on a yearly basis.

- 4.7 **Training** The Committee recommends the creation of a training package for members, and additional training for senior officers, on climate change mitigations and adaption, so that future decision makers are well informed in all aspects of the councils' operations, and the bearing climate change mitigation and adaption may have on them.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

A number of the review recommendations would have a financial implication, but these are as yet undefined. Depending on the Executive Member response to the recommendations these implications would need to be fully costed by officers and brought back to the Executive Portfolio Holder before any spending was agreed.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

There are no direct legal implications for this report.

### **5.3 Equalities Implications**

The Equalities implications have been addressed within the report at paragraph 3.6.1 There are no further equalities implications for this report.

### **5.4 Climate Change Implications**

By definition this report has climate change at its main focus and therefore climate change implications are addressed throughout the report.

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Links to the E&E Select Committee Meetings:

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Monday, 4 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 21 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 18 November 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Monday, 10 January 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Wednesday, 23 March 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 23 June 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Wednesday, 13 July 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Tuesday, 20 September 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 20 October 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 17 November 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 15 December 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** Leader of the Council  
**Date** 7 December 2022



## COST OF LIVING CRISIS RESPONSE

### KEY DECISION

**Authors** Ben Threadgold  
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### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Executive on the progress that Stevenage Borough Council and partners made in implementing the action plan agreed by Executive in October 2022 in response to the cost of living crisis in this country

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the updates to the Action Plan, attached at Appendix A, are noted.
- 2.2 That the Council continues to work with key local partners, including through the Stevenage Together Partnership, to develop a coordinated response across agencies to support residents, businesses and community groups
- 2.3 That further cost of living progress updates will be reported as part of the quarterly Corporate Performance and Budget Monitoring Reports. The next of these, for Quarter 3 of 2022/23, will be in March 2023.

- 2.4 That Executive notes that the potential for reduced income from fee-based services and people struggling to pay council tax and/or rent, coupled with increased demand for services and higher costs, could significantly impact on the Council's short and medium-term finances. This will continue to be closely monitored and reported to Executive as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget setting process.

### **3 INTRODUCTION**

- 3.1 As reported to Executive in October 2022, it is widely recognised and accepted that the United Kingdom is currently facing a cost of living crisis that is directly impacting all households and businesses to some extent.
- 3.2 The crisis is being driven by a number of factors, including (but not limited to) the cost of energy, food, fuel and other goods; the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia; highest levels of inflation for 40 years and rising interest rates; ongoing residual impact from the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. For businesses, other factors are also impacting such as increased supplier and material costs, challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, and transport costs.
- 3.3 It is also anticipated that the crisis will impact more significantly on the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country, including the lowest paid, single parents, people with disabilities and families with three or more children.
- 3.4 Executive approved a draft Action Plan for Stevenage at its meeting in October. This plan set out how the Council and its partners would continue to respond to the cost of living crisis, and mitigate the potential impacts on residents, businesses, council employees and Council finances as much as possible.
- 3.5 This report sets out the most significant announcements and changes since the previous report in October, as well as progress in implementing the actions agreed at that meeting.
- 3.6 It is important to recognise that the Council alone cannot address or mitigate the potential impacts and is already working with partners to develop an understanding of the local situation and appropriate actions in response. This will continue throughout the crisis, in keeping with its commitments as a Cooperative Council.

### **4 AUTUMN BUDGET STATEMENT**

- 4.1 The Chancellor presented an Autumn Budget Statement to Parliament on 17 November 2022. The statement was intended to provide some certainty for households, businesses and the financial markets are a turbulent period, and set out the support that would be available as well as how this support would be funded.
- 4.2 The Budget Statement was wide ranging, with the elements of most relevance to residents, businesses and the Council including:

#### **Cost of Living**

- Benefits to rise in line with inflation figure from Sept (10.1%)

- Pensions also to rise by 10.1% from April, sticking to the “triple lock” commitment
- National Living Wage for over-23’s to increase from £9.50/hour to £10.42 from April
- Targeted support for Cost of Living with additional payments of:
  - £900 for those on means-tested benefits
  - £300 to pensioner households
  - £150 to those on disability benefits
- Help for households through Energy Price Guarantee scheme will be extended for 12 months from April but be less generous – average household bill will rise to £3,000 per annum, up from £2,000 but lower than predicted £3,700 without government help
- Freezing tax allowances and thresholds until 2028 (extended from 2026) so more people will pay higher levels of tax sooner – tax personal allowance, higher rate threshold, inheritance tax thresholds all stay the same, highest rate tax threshold reduced from £150k to £125k
- Commitment to people raising their income, with support for over 600k people on Universal Credit to meet with a work coach to help increase their hours and/or earnings
- Rent rises in the social rented sector capped at 7%

### **Energy / Environment**

- Increased windfall tax on energy companies from 25% to 35%, extended to March 2028.
- Will also be a 40% tax on profits of older renewable and nuclear electricity generation
- Reaffirmed Government commitment to climate change measures, including a 68% reduction in emissions by 2030
- Will also double investment in energy efficiency of homes and businesses by £6bn from 2025
- Electric vehicles will no longer be exempt from road tax from April 2025.

### **Business**

- Almost £14bn reduction on business rates, benefiting about 700k businesses nationally
- From 1 April 2023, business rate bills in England will be updated to reflect changes in property values since the last revaluation in 2017. A package of support worth £13.6 billion over the next 5 years will support businesses as they transition to their new bills
- Employment Allowance threshold retained at £5k
- 40% of all firms will pay no national insurance contributions at all
- Investment Zones will be kept focused in “left behind areas” to build growth clusters, with more detail to be announced in the Spring Budget
- Tariffs will be cut to support business supply chains

### **Local Government**

- Likely to see a spending squeeze as a result of all government departments being asked to reduce costs, with the exception of health
  - Departmental spending commitments in 2021 spending round will be kept, and will grow at 1% per annum in the 3 years that follow
  - Extra £2.3bn per year for education in 2023/24 and 2024/25
  - £1bn next year and £1.7bn the year after for social care, funded by savings from delaying reforms
  - £3.3bn extra for NHS, but expectation of finding efficiency savings from improved ways of working and less waste – but not impacting frontline
  - Councils will be able to raise Council Tax by up to 3% without the need for a referendum, plus an additional up to 2% social care levy for those councils providing social care (Hertfordshire County Council in this county).
- 4.3 The full impact of these announcements is currently being worked through by Officers, including the impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget setting for 2023/4 onwards. Executive will be kept informed of the outcome of this modelling as the impact becomes clearer.
- 4.4 At a headline level, the additional support for residents and businesses is very welcome but is unlikely to fully mitigate the pressures that are being faced. The country has now entered a recession that is expected to last for some time, and there are predictions that unemployment is likely to rise in 2023 at the same time that living standards are predicted to fall by 7% over the next 2 years.
- 4.5 The implementation of changes to business rates will be closely monitored to track the impact on local businesses. It is hoped that the transitional funding announced will mean any reductions will be made in full, whilst increases will be staggered to lessen the immediate impact and to allow businesses to adjust. It is also important that there is an explicit commitment that local authorities will be fully compensated for the loss of income as a result of all business rates measures announced in the Autumn Statement and will receive new burdens funding for administrative and IT costs incurred in implementing them.
- 4.6 From a council perspective, the greater flexibility to raise council tax by 3%, raising the cap on social housing rent to 7% and positive news about income from business rates is also welcome, but has to be considered alongside the impact this will have on residents and businesses.
- 4.7 Further announcements will come in the Local Government Finance Settlement anticipated to be announced later in December and confirmed in February 2023, but overall the measures in the Autumn Statement will not significantly relieve the financial pressures local government is experiencing. The District Councils Network predict district councils will face a total collective budget shortfall of over £900m across 2022-23 and 2023-24, due to rising inflation, rising demand and pay pressures
- 4.8 As a result, the Council will continue to face difficult decisions how best to continue to help local residents and businesses with cost-of-living pressures whilst also setting a balanced budget.

## 5 LOCAL INTELLIGENCE

- 5.1 The Council continues to monitor the impact of the cost of living crisis locally, and share this information with partners. In particular, a cost of living dashboard has been developed jointly with Citizen's Advice Stevenage, and also including information from other partners such as Mind in Mid-Herts as well as nationally available data.
- 5.2 In addition to the overall impact mentioned above and reported nationally, four key trends are emerging from the data:
- **Tenant rent arrears** has increased by 13.32% since Quarter 1 of 2022/23, with 71% of this arrears attributable to tenants in receipt of welfare benefits (Universal Credit and Housing Benefit). There is also an increase in the numbers of complex cases, with people seeing a change in financial circumstances, multiple debts, need for urgent support, and associated health and wellbeing concerns. This also makes people more susceptible to scams and fraud, with targeted advice and support needed.
  - **Domestic abuse referrals** to SADA and the NO More Service have also seen a significant increase, up 88% compared to 12 months ago. This trend is likely to reflect heightened pressures that households are facing, and mirrors similar increases during the Covid-19 pandemic and previous economic downturn in 2008.
  - **Discretionary Housing Payment requests** are increasing significantly with almost 300 received between April and September this year. This comes at the same time as the funding the Council receives has reduced by almost 30% and the Government has raised the threshold for support. This means that more tenants are being refused support (11% in Quarter 1), and those that are successful are getting less money.
  - The number of **Council Tax Support Scheme claimants** has reduced by almost 10% compared to 2021/22, at the same time as Citizens Advice are seeing an increasing number of clients with council tax arrears (35% increase comparing August 2021 to August 2022). Targeted communications to increase awareness of the support available are underway.
- 5.3 This information is being used to inform partners, and to help shape further targeted support and action in response.

## 6 PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLAN

- 6.1 As mentioned previously, the Council is focusing on the impact of the cost of living crisis on local residents, businesses and community groups, Council employees and the Council's finances.
- 6.2 The Council is also concentrating on a number of key themes that the Council is able to directly influence:
- Understanding the various impacts of the crisis, to enable targeted support to be prioritised where needed the most and to help track the impact of any actions and interventions
  - Co-ordinating Government support to reach those that need it

- Providing information, support and advice, including promoting and signposting to the most appropriate sources
  - Maintaining good health, including physical, mental and community wellbeing such as volunteering
  - Access to food and nutrition, including community larders, food banks, gardens, healthy eating and cooking advice and support
  - Housing, including costs, repairs and improvements, retrofitting and decarbonisation
  - Working in partnership to co-ordinate Council activities, maximise their impact and to target support in localities / to the most in need
- 6.3 An update showing progress against the previously agreed action plan is attached as Appendix A.
- 6.4 Particular highlights worth drawing attention to include:

### **Residents**

- The Cost of Living Hub on the website continues to be reviewed and updated as more relevant information is released locally and nationally. The layout of the site has been amended to make it easier to navigate.
- Leaflets about the support available have been developed jointly with Citizen's Advice Stevenage and are being distributed by the Council Income Team.
- The Council is now part of the Money Advisor Network to broaden offer and ability to refer people for support, including training for Income Officers, referral routes and access for staff to complement existing Employee Assistance offering
- The Stevenage Warm Spaces Network launched in November, promoting opportunities in council-owned buildings across the town as well as those offered by voluntary and public sector partners. The focus is having Warm Spaces as close to people's homes as possible, that there is a good spread throughout the week and across the town, and there is the option of meaningful activities and advice as well as some spaces that are simply available for people to sit and spend time. The scheme is being promoted both online and via community noticeboards, direct mail, the Chronicle magazine and through community partners, recognising the target audience may not use our website.. The Stevenage scheme is aligned with the Herts County Council offer, unlocking potential support and funding as well as wider promotion through the online directory.
- Cost of Living Crisis event hosted by Reed in Partnership at Argyle Way on 18 October, supported by The Council's No More Service and SADA. This was aimed at their clients, but was also open more widely.
- The Council also supported a mental health and wellbeing event "Creating a resilient mind-set and face every challenge" on 15 November in partnership with ActionCoach.

### **Businesses**

- Businesses are being signposted to the Herts Growth Board online hub as a key source of support and advice.
- The Hertfordshire Growth Hub has launched a 'Cost of Living Business Survey', which SBC is helping to raise awareness of and will benefit from the findings and feedback. The Hub recognises that local businesses and



employers are also facing similar challenges to those of their staff, with rising costs and other inflationary pressures.

- All commercial tenants are being proactively contacted and individual circumstances reviewed where appropriate

### **Council Employees**

- A dedicated online hub for staff is now live and being regularly updated, including financial advice and signposting to the Council's Employee Assistance Programme should people want to access it. This content has been shared with other local authorities who are interested in replicating it.
- The national pay award was agreed and is now being implemented as swiftly as possible for all staff. It will be backdated to April.

### **Council Finances**

- The Council continues to model the adverse impact of the crisis on council finances, and in particular rising inflation and energy costs, the higher than anticipated pay award for staff, reductions in income including rent arrears and council tax as well as parking (for example), and the impact on tenants and leaseholders.
- This modelling links to reviews of the MTFs, Housing Revenue Account and budget setting conversations for 2023/24, and reflects announcements as part of the Autumn Budget statement on 17 November.
- Engagement with existing suppliers is ongoing to understand current and predicted situation. The pipeline of upcoming contracts is also being reviewed to understand where potential increases and challenges in procuring competitive suppliers may come, and where increases to budget may be needed
- Communications to residents are underway setting out the impact of current financial situation on the Council and the potential impact on council tax

### **Governance, collaboration and oversight**

- The Executive Member Working Group and Officer Working Group continue to meet regularly and oversee the response to the crisis.
- All Councillors have been briefed in writing, about the support that is available to them and to residents and businesses, and an all-Member Briefing on 7 November was well attended.
- Two meetings of the Stevenage Together Partnership have taken place to share intelligence and planned actions. Examples of partnership working include promoting the social value benefits to local businesses of supporting the warm spaces scheme, development of "full financial MOT's" for residents and reinvigorating healthy eating and cooking programmes run by Stevenage FC Football Foundation and Step 2 Skills.
- A dashboard has been developed and is being regularly updated and reviewed by the Welfare Reform Group and Cost of Living Officer Working Group. This includes input and data from partners including Citizen's Advice and has already helped to identify key trends such as increases in rent arrears, domestic abuse referrals and requests for

Discretionary Housing Payments as well as reductions in council tax collection and requests for Council Tax Support.

## **7 FURTHER ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

- 7.1 The Environment and Economy Select Committee are scoping a review into the cost of living crisis. Whilst appreciating the Committee's desire to understand the impact of the crisis locally, Officers are supporting the scoping to ensure it is mindful of the exceptional challenges and pressures being faced by the Council, the fact the crisis is evolving and developing, and the capacity needed to report in detail to multiple bodies. To avoid duplicating the focus of the existing Executive Member and Officer Working Groups and the Stevenage Together Partnership, it is proposed that information and updates will also be shared with the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee.

## **8 NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 The ongoing implementation of the action plan will continue to be overseen by the Executive Member Working Group, supported by the Officer Working Group.
- 8.2 The ongoing response will be kept under close review, and the approach adapted where appropriate to reflect changing circumstances and learning from local, regional and national interventions if/when alternative actions are considered to be more effective.
- 8.3 The approach will also be closely monitored to align with any further relevant announcements from Government and other sources, and any funding that is made available.
- 8.4 Further cost of living progress updates will be reported as part of the quarterly Corporate Performance and Budget Monitoring Reports. The next of these, for Quarter 3 of 2022/23, will be in March 2023.
- 8.5 The Stevenage Together Partnership will continue to coordinate joint responses to the cost of living crisis and is scheduled to meet again early in 2023.

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

- 9.1 The Leader, Executive Members and Senior Leadership Team have all been consulted about and engaged in the ongoing response to the cost of living crisis, as have partners through the Stevenage Together Partnership.
- 9.2 The focus is on areas the Council can directly influence that will have a positive impact in mitigating the impact of the crisis on local residents, businesses and community groups, Council employees and the Council's finances.
- 9.3 Executive could choose to take a different approach to helping to mitigate the impacts, but it is felt that the current proposals and governance arrangements

will be the most effective given their initial focus is based on local evidence, flexibility, oversight and commitment to working with others.

## **10 IMPLICATIONS**

### **10.1 Financial Implications**

10.1.1 The adverse financial implications highlighted in this report will be further developed and monitored as part of the financial modelling linked to the MTFS and budget setting for 2023/24.

10.1.2 Officers responsible for delivering the actions set out within this report continue to identify and consider any resulting financial implications.

10.1.3 The cost of living crisis is already impacting directly on Council finances and will continue to do so. In addition to increasing costs for fuel, energy and other materials, the Council is likely to see an increase in demand for many services at the same time as a reduction in income from fee-based services and people struggling to pay council tax and rent. This will be closely monitored and could lead to challenging decisions needing to be taken about the Medium Term Financial Strategy in due course.

### **10.2 Legal Implications**

10.2.1 There are no direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for delivering the activity set out within this report will need to identify and consider any resulting legal implications in consultation with the Borough Solicitor.

### **10.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

10.3.1 There are no direct equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising from this report, although it is possible that the impacts of the cost of living crisis will be greater for people on lower incomes, with disabilities, and with caring responsibilities so actions will prioritise support for the most vulnerable where possible.

10.3.2 Where necessary, Equality Impact Assessments will be completed for programmes, projects and service changes identified to ensure any negative, differential impacts are mitigated where possible.

### **10.4 Risk Implications**

10.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). However, the potential impacts of the cost of living crisis are already being monitored as part of the Strategic Risk Register and officers responsible for delivering the actions set out within this report will need to consider any risk implications that arise.

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

## **10.5 Other Corporate implications**

10.5.1 Implementing the priorities and improvement activity outlined in this report may impact on the development of future policy or procedure, and require the realignment of resources to deliver specific actions.

## **11 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

## **12 APPENDICES**

- Appendix A: Cost of Living Action Plan Progress Update November 2022

## Appendix A –Cost of Living Action Plan Progress Update November 2022

<b>Residents</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Update November 2022</b>
Continue to develop and update the online Cost of Living information hub in the Council website, covering Council support and signposting to other support, including Government and local grants, advice about avoiding scams, and support with household costs such as school uniforms	December 2022	Corporate Policy	<p>Website continues to be reviewed and updated as more relevant information is released locally and nationally</p> <p>Layout of site has been amended to make it easier to navigate</p> <p>Leaflets about the support available have been developed jointly with Citizen’s Advice Stevenage and are being distributed by the Council Income Team.</p> <p>Specific advice on avoiding scams has been shared on social media, including links to the Herts County Council scheme on fraud awareness. Information will also be included with rent notification letters in early 2023</p>
Work with partners including Citizen’s Advice and the Money Advice Unit to offer residents a comprehensive advice and support service – a “full financial MOT” looking at short-term and longer-term changes that will improve their financial resilience	November 2022	Corporate Policy / Cooperative Neighbourhoods	<p>Continue to develop and promote the range of support available and offering “full financial MOT’s” as part of any contact with clients referred for welfare support</p> <p>The Council is now part of the Money Advisor Network to broaden offer and ability to refer people for support, including training for Income Officers, referral routes and access for staff to complement</p>

			existing Employee Assistance offering
Work with partners to develop a Warm Spaces scheme, utilising public, community and other buildings to offer comfort during the winter months, alongside information, advice and other social opportunities to support people	November 2022	Cooperative Neighbourhoods	<p>Stevenage Warm Spaces Network launched in November, promoting opportunities in council-owned buildings across the town as well as those offered by voluntary and public sector partners. The scheme is being promoted both online and via community noticeboards, direct mail, the Chronicle magazine and through community partners.</p> <p>The Stevenage scheme is aligned with the Herts County Council offer, unlocking potential support and funding as well as wider promotion through the online directory</p>
Advice to help people with cooking on a budget, including links to Step to Skills to develop learning opportunities	December 2022	Cooperative Neighbourhoods	<p>Step to Skills are actively exploring the option to run courses locally</p> <p>Stevenage FC Foundation are also looking to provide more information on their cooking classes as part of the healthy hub programme of work, and link to further funding opportunities to improve sustainability</p>
Promote availability of local employment opportunities, and skills and training courses (including funding available to support access) to help raise awareness and confidence for people to increase income and improve their financial wellbeing	January 2023	Planning and Regulation / Communications and Marketing	<p>Cost of Living Crisis event hosted by Reed in Partnership at Argyle Way on 18<sup>th</sup> October, supported by SBC No More Service and SADA. This was aimed at their clients, but also open more widely.</p> <p>The Council also supported a mental health and wellbeing event – “Create a resilient mind-set and face every challenge” event on 15 November in partnership with ActionCoach.</p>

			Further events are planned for early 2023
<b>Businesses and Community Groups</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Update November 2022</b>
Develop and/or signpost to existing online information and support hub (such as the Herts Growth Board), to increase awareness of the support, funding and advice available	November 2022	Planning and Regulation	Businesses are being signposted to the Herts Growth Board online hub as a key source of support and advice which is constantly being reviewed and updated
Utilise existing relationships and networks to reach out to local businesses and community groups to understand what support they need, and what interventions from the Council and partners would be most beneficial in supporting them	December 2022	Planning and Regulation	The Hertfordshire Growth Hub has launched a 'Cost of Living Business Survey' to help understand and address the issues businesses are currently facing and plan for future support requirements. The Council is helping to raise awareness of the survey and will benefit from the findings and feedback, which will also be used to lobby BEIS for further support for businesses
Contact businesses that are Council tenants to offer support and to promote information, advice and other measures to help those in financial difficulty	December 2022	Estates and Facilities	All council tenants are being proactively contacted and individual circumstances reviewed where appropriate  The impact of reductions in business rates announced in the Autumn Budget Statement is also being reviewed
<b>Council Employees</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Update November 2022</b>

Develop an online information and support hub promoting the internal and external information, advice, support available to employees	November 2022	HR	Online hub for staff is now live and being regularly updated. This content has been shared with other local authorities who are interested in replicating it.
Provide financial advice and support about short term loans, avoiding scams and so on given the marked increase in both that has been reported nationally amongst public sector employees	November 2022	HR	Internal communication with staff is underway to raise awareness of issues and the support available should they need it, and an all-staff briefing is planned to further explain this  The Employee Assistance Programme and Good Shape are providing metrics on staff usage. Good Shape is also signposting staff to financial support services.
Implement the outcome of the national pay review, once confirmed following consultation with the Unions	January 2023	HR	The national pay award was agreed by 2 of the 3 unions, and is now being implemented. It will be backdated to April.
Promote and role-model the Council's flexible working policies, including recognising that more employees living locally may choose to come into the office to reduce heating costs at home (for example)	November 2022	HR	This is linked to the online information hub for staff, and reminders to managers of the support available for employees.
<b>Council Finances</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Update November 2022</b>



Modelling impact of inflation and other rising costs on Council budgets, in year and for 2023/24	January 2023	Finance	<p>Modelling work continues, linked to reviews of the MTFs, HRA and budget setting conversations for 2023/24. This reflects announcements as part of the Autumn Budget statement on 17 November, including raising the Council Tax threshold, extending the energy price guarantee, and setting the social rent cap limit at 7%.</p> <p>Communications to residents are underway setting out the impact of current financial situation on the Council and the potential impact on council tax</p>
Engaging with suppliers to understand any likely price increases and/or issues with availability of goods and services as a result of increased cost and pressures for them	December 2022	Corporate Procurement	Engagement with existing suppliers is ongoing to understand current and predicted situation. The pipeline of upcoming contracts is also being reviewed to understand where potential increases and challenges in procuring competitive suppliers may come, and where increases to budget may be needed
Develop and implement decarbonisation schemes to reduce Council and tenant costs. This will include a bid to Round 2.1 of the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund targeting properties with a EPC D rating or below.	November 2022	Housing and Investment	This was considered and approved by Executive on 12/10/2022, and work on the bid is ongoing.
Modelling the impact of energy increases in the charges to tenants and leaseholders, to consider how best to support people with	December 2022	Finance	<p>Modelling work continues, linked to reviews of the MTFs, HRA and budget setting conversations for 2023/24</p> <p>600+ tenants will not be covered by district heating</p>

managing costs			<p>scheme and won't get an energy rebate. Financial pressures are likely to lead to more communities wanting help, more homeless presentations, impact on our fees and charges e.g. service charges.</p> <p>Details of how the latest energy payments to residents and businesses will be paid through the recently announced Energy Bills Support Scheme and alternative funding support for those who do not have a domestic electricity meter or a direct relationship with an energy supplier are also awaited, and if required to be distributed by the Council this will be done as swiftly as possible</p>
<b>Governance, collaboration and oversight</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Update November 2022</b>
Continue to work through the Stevenage Together Partnership to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate	January 2023	Corporate Policy	<p>Two meetings of the Stevenage Together Partnership have focused on the cost of living crisis, and shared detail of the evidence organisations are gathering about the impact locally.</p> <p>Examples of partnership working include promoting the social value benefits to local businesses of supporting the warm spaces scheme, development of "full financial MOT's" for residents and reinvigorating healthy eating and cooking programmes run by Stevenage FC Football Foundation and Step 2 Skills.</p> <p>The next Stevenage Together Meeting is planned for January 2023. All partners have been asked to continue sharing issues they are identifying, and actions they are taking in response to the crisis</p>

Continue to work with the County and district and borough councils in Hertfordshire to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate	January 2023	Corporate Policy	Continue to link with others. Primary link currently is to the countywide Warmer Spaces work being led by Herts County Council, and the online directory and funding schemes in partnership with Herts Community Foundation and Communities 1 <sup>st</sup> .
Develop local dashboard to track impact, analyse outcomes of any interventions, and to inform targeted action, linked to the Welfare Reform Group and Citizen's Advice	November 2022	Corporate Policy	Dashboard has been developed and is being regularly updated and reviewed by the Welfare Reform Group and Cost of Living Officer Working Group. It includes input and data from partners including Citizen's Advice and is also being aligned with the countywide dashboard being developed by Herts County Council  Key trends are included within report to Executive in December, and were shared with Stevenage Together Partnership in November
Further develop the use of the Social Value Portal to divert funding from Council contractors to local skills development and key local investment priorities	March 2023	Cooperative Neighbourhoods	This work is currently being scoped.

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