

Meeting EXECUTIVE
Portfolio Area The Leader
Date 8 July 2020



ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

NON-KEY DECISION

Authors Charlie Smith/Katrina Shirley | 2457/2018
Contributors Gareth Wall | 2835, Assistant Directors
Lead Officer Matt Partridge | 2456
Contact Officer Richard Protheroe | 2938

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the content of the Council's draft Annual Report 2019/20 at Appendix A, and to consider arrangements for final publication.
- 1.2 To highlight the Council's performance across a number of key themes and priorities during 2019/20.
- 1.3 To consider the focus for the Future Town Future Council programme for 2020/21, which will form the backbone of the Council's Covid-19 recovery plans.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive notes progress on the delivery of the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) programme and considers overall performance and achievements of the Council during 2019/20.
- 2.2 That the Executive agrees the content and publication of the Council’s draft Annual Report 2019/20, as set out at Appendix A to this report.
- 2.3 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) following consultation with the Leader to approve any final changes to the Annual Report prior to its publication.
- 2.4 That the Future Town Future Council deliverables for 2020/21 be noted.
- 2.5 That the suite of 2020/21 performance measures and targets, as set out at Appendix B to this report, be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Annual Report 2019/20 reviews, and informs the community of, our progress in delivering the Council’s Corporate Plan ‘Our Co-operative Council - Future Town Future Council’ during 2019/20.
- 3.2 Members approved the current Corporate Plan in December 2016. It reflects the Council’s continuing focus on co-operative working and outlines the key outcomes and priorities for the town over the period 2016-2021 through the flagship Future Town Future Council (FTFC) transformation programme, as seen in figure 1.



Figure 1: Future Town, Future Council Programme

- 3.3 At the Executive meeting on 11 March 2020, the Executive agreed the suite of strategies to be included within the scope of a new FTFC programme, 'Place of Choice'. Associated actions for 2020/21 have been identified within this report (see paragraph 3.41). The scope of this strand will develop further over time as new strategic priorities emerge.
- 3.4 Council services are organised into eight Business Units across three themes: Customer, Place and Transformation and Support. In addition to monitoring progress on the delivery of the FTFC Programme throughout the year, performance across these (Council Service) themes is monitored, to highlight achievements and identify any areas for improvement. Key performance results at Quarter 4 were reported at the Executive meeting on 9 June 2020, and Members were advised of the improvement plans identified for ongoing monitoring by the Senior Leadership Team into 2020/21.
- 3.5 The Annual Report 2019/20 outlines what has been delivered throughout the course of the year against the outcomes and aims within the FTFC Corporate Plan programme, as well as celebrating achievements across the range of Council services. It also summarises key activities that are planned for 2020/21.
- 3.6 Further details of these achievements and plans are also presented in the remainder of this Executive report, which should be read alongside the report entitled 'Coronavirus (Covid-19) Incident Update Report & Recovery Plan', which is also under consideration at this Executive meeting. Executive Members will note that there is a significant connection between the FTFC programme deliverables set out below and the key actions included against each theme within the Town and Council Recovery Plans. The Stevenage Cooperative Recovery Taskforce will most likely focus on the following areas, many of which will be delivered through the external facing strands of the FTFC Corporate Plan programme (specifically Regeneration, Housing Development, Excellent Council Homes, Co-operative Neighbourhood Management and Place of Choice):
- Economic support and recovery
 - Infrastructure projects including regeneration and new council homes
 - Community wealth building, support for jobs and skills
 - Climate change
 - Safe spaces, safe places
 - Supporting vulnerable people – including rough sleepers and those suffering from domestic abuse
 - Revitalising health and increasing community cohesion and resilience
 - Engagement and communication – to undertake appropriate engagement with residents, communities and businesses to inform thinking on the recovery response.

Future Town, Future Council Programme Annual Update

- 3.7 This section (paragraphs 3.10 to 3.61 below) outlines the programme outcomes, overview, 2019/20 successes and 2020/21 deliverables for each FTFC programme.
- 3.8 Officers have conducted a review of the FTFC programmes for the coming year and have engaged with Executive Members and the Opposition Group Leaders via informal briefings, to help shape the direction of this programme for the year ahead; to identify priorities; and to test the progress and deliverability of key projects in the context of Covid-19 and the Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account financial resources.
- 3.9 This review has been used to inform the FTFC deliverables that are set out below, many of which, as stated above, are also factored into the Council's Covid-19 recovery plans. It is acknowledged that the Stevenage recovery plans will need to remain flexible to adapt to changing circumstances and financial and other challenges over the coming months, and as such the FTFC programme itself is also subject to change. Any key changes to the FTFC deliverables for 2020/21 will be reported to the Executive through the Quarterly Corporate Performance Reports.

External Facing Programmes

Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration Programme

3.10 Programme Outcomes

- A new vibrant town centre delivered through a phased regeneration programme
- Two major regeneration schemes to advance

3.11 Programme Overview

3.12 Regeneration of the town centre is the Council's number one priority and was the priority most often placed in residents' 'top three' in the town-wide survey undertaken in 2017. The Council wants to make Stevenage a destination of choice through delivering a new vibrant town centre, with quality shopping, office and leisure facilities and new homes.

3.13 The Council officially announced the appointment of Mace as the development partner for the first phase of town centre regeneration (SG1) in February 2018. This ambitious scheme will bring £350million of private investment into the town centre. It will see the area covering the Council (Daneshill House) offices, the Plaza, bus station and some of the adjacent car parks redeveloped with new shops, bars and restaurants, homes, new public spaces, and a central public sector hub accommodating the Council offices, library, exhibition space, and health services.

3.14 Key programme successes during 2019/20 included the following:

- The visitor centre in the town opened and displays information about all of the planned regeneration programmes, scale models of the plans, exclusive video content including a 3D fly through, and a LEGO replica of Stevenage Town Centre. This provides a practical and physical platform for residents to put forward their views as schemes emerge, as well as to learn about the history of the town, its attractions and the development schemes.
- A public consultation was held by Mace to showcase plans for the town centre and seek public feedback. This event was well attended with over 500 people seeing the plans.
- Work is well underway on the Town Square and Town Square North Block where new paving, lighting and drainage are being introduced.
- The £50m Queensway North scheme, in partnership with Reef has been further progressed. The scheme will introduce a range of new retail, flexible working, conference facilities and bar and restaurant space into one of our town's most iconic areas.
- The first official meeting of the Stevenage Development board was held and the officer team has commissioned consultants to support the creation of the town investment plan. The Board has now met four times and is developing plans for the future, and supporting delivery of projects funded through the national 'Growth Deal' programme.

3.15 During 2020/21 the programme will focus on:

- Developing the Town Fund investment plan which will be overseen by the Stevenage Development board.
- Working with the LEP to ensure Growth Deal funding is secured for specific schemes.
- Supporting and enabling the start of Phase 1 of the £350m+ SG1 project in conjunction with Mace, including Swingate House and the former police station site. (This is subject to a determination first being made on the SG1 planning application.)
- Completing a business case for bringing forward the Public Sector hub development, to enable acceleration of the broader SG1 scheme.
- Completing works on the Town Square and Town Square North Block projects.
- The transformation of Queensway through the completion of the first phases of work as part of the Reef development.
- Beginning construction of the new Bus Interchange, subject to permission being granted.
- Developing long term plans to support development around the station area.

- Developing the funded CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) on-site Training Hub as part of the Stevenage Works initiative in conjunction with Job Centre Plus and North Herts College.
- Delivering the 2020/21 Marketing Strategy, focussing on inclusive engagement.

Housing Development Programme

3.16 Programme Outcomes

- Increased number of affordable homes in Stevenage
- Improved access to the housing market in Stevenage for a greater number of residents

3.17 Programme Overview

3.18 Providing decent, social and affordable homes appropriate to the needs of our residents is one of the Council's key priorities and again was high on the agenda for many respondents to the 2017 town-wide Resident Survey. The Council is meeting this priority by delivering its own new build programme.

3.19 Key programme successes during 2019/20 included:

- 65 social and affordable homes were delivered, including schemes at Blackwell Close and Burwell Court, bringing the total to 238 homes since the programme began.
- Further schemes are under construction at Ditchmore Lane where 10 private sale homes will be made available, bringing in receipts that will enable re-investment elsewhere in the town.
- The contractor for the flagship independent living scheme at Kenilworth Close was appointed. The Kenilworth scheme as a whole will provide over 200 homes when completed.

3.20 Next year the programme will focus on:

- Completing work on 10 new homes at Ditchmore Lane and continuing to work on delivering a further 240 homes, including sites at Shephall Way, Kenilworth Close, North Road and Symonds Green.
- Seeking planning permission on future schemes for approximately 300 more new homes.
- Procuring the design team for the Oval scheme masterplan, undertaking consultation on the designs and setting out a timetable for the development.
- Exploring the viability of other potential areas of development across the town including opportunities to work in partnership with other providers.
- Continuing to work with partners to enable the delivery of additional affordable homes.

- Creating a Wholly Owned Company (WOC) to deliver homes outside the HRA.

Excellent Council Homes Programme

3.21 Programme Outcomes

- Transforming the Housing and Investment service to better meet the needs of its customers
- Effective investment in council homes through planned programmes of work

3.22 Programme Overview

3.23 The Council's aim is to provide high quality, efficient and effective housing services and to improve the quality of its council homes.

3.24 In 2017 the Council committed through the Excellent Council Homes programme to transform its housing services to better meet the needs of its customers. Members agreed to invest an additional £1.5m to enable the delivery of the associated transformation programme. Whilst the programme was set to conclude in March 2021 thought is being given to the ongoing transformation needs of the service.

3.25 The Excellent Council Homes programme includes a number of key workstreams, including:

- Major Investment in Flat Blocks: focused on delivery of the £45m Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC), sprinkler systems and lift replacements in council-owned flat blocks.
- Digital Housing: aimed at providing tenants with the opportunity to contact us at a time and in a way that suits them as well as improving back office processes.
- Knowing our Customers: aimed at understanding our customers' needs and prioritising them to provide bespoke services where possible.
- Strategic Development: ensuring priorities and plans are in place to provide housing and support to older people and to people who are homeless.
- Service and Personal Development: focused on delivery of a cohesive team provided with the right tools and skills to deliver excellent customer service.

3.26 Progress during 2019/20 included:

- Phase 1 of the 5 year MRC programme completed and preparations are now being made to commence Phase 2.
- Seven lifts have been refurbished as part of the lift refurbishment programme.
- The contract for the Sprinkler Programme was awarded.

- The Housing Online Service, which will provide housing customers with access to housing services online, was developed and ready for its 'soft launch'.
- Digital improvements linked to the Northgate Housing Management System were made, both to allow officers to spend more time on-site supporting tenants and to improve the correspondence between customers and the Council.
- Stevenage Borough Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was launched.
- The Business Unit Review was completed ready to go live on 1 April 2020. The structure has been designed to support the co-operative neighbourhood working model and respond to changes in government legislation.

3.27 During 2020/21 the programme will primarily focus on:

- Finalising the Housing Older People's Strategy in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council.
- Delivering Phase 2 of the 5-year MRC programme.
- Refurbishing a further 4 lifts as part of the lift refurbishment programme.
- Consulting with residents about the sprinkler retro-fitting programme, mobilising the contract and commencing works.
- Continuing to improve services to the customer through the housing on-line application; a review of the end-to-end repairs process; building on the use of mobile working applications; and evaluating the outcome of the innovation labs.
- Supporting homeless people by delivering the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Action plan and responding to the Government's initiatives for rough sleepers in light of Covid-19.
- Completing recruitment to vacant posts within the new Business Unit structure and evaluating how successful the new structure has been in terms of the service delivery/customer satisfaction and staff satisfaction.
- Introducing a series of 'innovation labs' to involve staff in influencing further digitalisation of the housing offer.
- Assessing and evaluating the Housing All Under One Roof Transformation programme to inform further service improvement opportunities.

Co-operative & Neighbourhood Management Programme

3.28 **Programme Outcomes**

- Residents feel that they can work with the Council and other organisations to help meet the needs of the local area
- Staff better understand the town's communities and through doing so are more able to deliver the change that is required
- Public spaces are more attractive, better cared for by the Council and residents and help to give people pride in the place they live
- The town's community centres are efficiently run, well-managed and most importantly, meet local needs

3.29 **Programme Overview**

3.30 The Co-operative Neighbourhood Management (CNM) programme sets out how the Council will work with communities to improve neighbourhoods. Through working together with residents and other partners the Council believes public spaces can be made more attractive and in turn help to give people pride in the place they live. The CNM programme was formally launched at Stevenage Day in June 2017 and is complemented by an 'Our Neighbourhood' area on the Council's website. Focused investment in neighbourhood improvements has continued to progress throughout the year. The programme has now been further re-purposed to provide FTFC oversight for the development of the Council's approach to area-based co-operative neighbourhood management.

3.31 Key successes during 2019/20 included:

- The majority of public realm enhancements across St Nicholas and Martins Wood have been completed – works have ranged from renewing footpaths to upgrading road signs and repairing/replacing fences, bollards and brick walls.
- Initial consultation for the roll out of CNM investment in Bedwell and Longmeadow began, with engagement from local businesses, community organisations and schools to assess where partnership working can be utilised.
- A review of the Council owned community centres in Stevenage was completed and approved and will form the basis of a future sustainable operating model. Extensive consultation took place to inform the review, with 340 responses recorded and 42 focus groups held.
- A Stevenage approach to Community Wealth Building was developed to include an inclusive economy charter, a community balance sheet and ways of working with the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Going forward, this programme of activity will fall within the scope of the Place of Choice Programme.
- The principles and direction of travel for the roll-out of the Co-operative Neighbourhoods working model were agreed. This will enable all services in one locality to work more closely together to engage with residents on what matters to them and to ensure a coordinated, efficient and effective response to local needs.

3.32 During 2020/21 the programme will focus on:

- Implementing the Co-operative Neighbourhood working model, to enhance co-operative working across council services in neighbourhoods.
- Beginning to roll out elements of the new sustainable model for the provision and management of community centres.
- Public realm investments in Bedwell and Longmeadow, which will be determined by the community and seek co-operation from local groups, businesses and partner agencies, subject to funding becoming available. *(Spend is currently on hold as part of the Covid-19 General Fund resilience measures, which are referenced in the Medium Term Financial Strategy review reported to the Executive in June 2020; these measures are in place until at least 30 September 2020, when a further review of the financial position will be undertaken).*
- Replacing and installing new litter bins across Roebuck and Old Town.
- Progressing the Garage Programme.

Connected to our Customers Programme

3.33 Programme Outcomes

- Use of self-service is encouraged, so more time can be spent with customers that need extra help
- Increased customer satisfaction for residents interacting with key services
- Online customer data protected and better used to provide useful insight
- The Council uses technology to meet its ambitions and make its workforce more modern, efficient and responsive to customer needs
- A simple and clearer website with more self-service choices

3.34 Programme Overview

3.35 The 'Connected to our Customers' programme aims to improve the accessibility of the Council's services and the customer experience. It will enhance the way residents can access Council services through increasing the use of digital options, whilst ensuring that officers continue to spend time with those customers who require additional assistance.

3.36 The Council's digital aspirations will evolve as we co-operatively redesign services with our workforce and customers. This modernisation of service delivery will allow the Council to be more responsive to customer needs and flexible in order to adapt more quickly to changing demands or priorities.

3.37 Key successes during 2019/20 included:

- The launch of the new integrated digital solution, Firmstep, which will enable integrations between systems, to join up council service delivery and provide better customer facing online service channels.

- The launch of the new management system for Environmental Services, Bartec, which has enhanced the information available to Customer Services and online self-service when handling residential waste and recycling enquires.
- Work has commenced on describing a new customer offer for online, telephone and in-person interactions.

3.38 During 2020/21 the programme will focus on:

- Improving the online offer for residents and businesses by delivering a simple, clearer website and straightforward online self-service options for key council services.
- Developing and implementing the Council's channel management approach and enable people to use digital services.
- Supporting the overall customer service offer and efficiency by improving back office processes and technology within the Council.
- Developing the digital platform to support the Coronavirus response and those who are vulnerable.
- Ensuring the new website is compliant with digital accessibility regulations.
- Developing a new Digital Strategy that will set out how the Council will embrace digital change to support corporate priorities.

Place of Choice Programme

3.39 Programme Outcomes

- Working to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of Stevenage residents
- Building resilient communities, reducing crime and disorder and helping people feel safe
- Making Stevenage a 'destination creative' town
- Unlocking opportunities for the local economy and our residents, ensuring that future regeneration and growth in Stevenage works for everyone
- Achieving net zero Council emissions by 2030 and leading work to achieve this aim for the town, its businesses and residents
- Establishing Stevenage as a leader in sustainable transport
- Enhancing Stevenage's biodiversity by conserving, restoring, recreating and reconnecting wildlife habitats, whilst increasing awareness and appreciation of Stevenage's wildlife

3.40 Programme Overview

3.41 The new Place of Choice programme aims to improve the quality of life for Stevenage residents and enhance the experience for visitors to the town, through co-operative partnership working and community engagement. The

following existing and emerging strategies/plans are included in the scope of the programme:

- Healthy Stevenage Strategy 2018-22
- Community Safety Strategy 2018-21
- Stevenage Re-imagined 2018-22
- Community Wealth Building Strategy
- Climate Change Strategy
- Future Town Future Transport Strategy 2019-21
- Biodiversity Action plan 2017-22

3.42 Key priorities are well-established for the existing strategies and are in development for the emerging strategies and the scope of this strand will develop further over time as new priorities emerge. There are also synergies between this programme and other outward facing FTFC programmes, which will also contribute to place shaping in Stevenage (most notably the Cooperative Neighbourhood Management programme, the Town Centre Regeneration programme and the Housing Development programme).

3.43 Although the Place of Choice programme itself has only recently been established, successes were achieved in respect of all existing strategies in scope during 2019/20. For the purposes of this report, these successes are included within the 'Customer' and 'Place' Business Unit Theme Updates (see paragraphs 3.62-3.98 below). During 2020/21 monitoring and reporting against POC deliverables will move within the scope of the FTFC programme monitoring arrangements rather than through Business Unit Theme Updates.

3.44 Key areas of focus in 2020/21 will include:

Healthy Stevenage

- Launching a new Young People's Healthy Hub project to reduce physical inactivity, improve mental wellbeing, and provide advice and support for residents aged 11-16 years old.
- Improving the way we evidence and evaluate the impact of health and wellbeing projects and interventions working closely with the University of Hertfordshire.
- Communicating better with local residents and professionals to raise awareness of local health improvement projects and services via a wider variety of communication channels.
- Continuing to work with health and physical activity partners to deliver the Healthy Stevenage Strategy 2018-2022.
- Continuing to collaborate and integrate our work with other key health and wellbeing strategies across Hertfordshire.
- Improving the way we work with local communities in co-designing health and wellbeing projects and services.

Community Safety

- Working with partners to deliver initiatives to respond to the key Community Safety priorities of Violent Crime, Hate Crime and Community Reassurance.
- Cooperatively working to break the cycle of substance misuse and offending.
- Tackling perceptions of ASB through a media campaign highlighting how Stevenage is a safe place to live, visit and work in.
- Increased cooperative work in the community to tackle ASB.
- Improving awareness of safeguarding issues in our community.

Stevenage Re-Imagined

- Implementing arts and heritage installations in the planning phase.
- Implementing the Creative Use Scheme pilot in the town centre, giving local artists/artisans/creatives the opportunity to utilise underproductive/empty buildings in Stevenage town centre.
- Developing new cultural proposals and initiatives in the town centre and across neighbourhoods.
- Undertaking Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partnership needs analysis & early commissioned delivery.
- Piloting new heritage activities as we develop plans for a new museum for Stevenage.
- Working co-operatively with the newly formed Junction 7 Creatives and others in the local creative community on the above projects.
- Developing a series of options that could potentially form part of the Council's Town Deal Proposition to Government

Community Wealth Building

- Launching an Inclusive Economy Charter as part of the Council's commitment to Community Wealth Building, ensuring local people and businesses can benefit from opportunities created.
- Supporting Herts Growth Board to develop a policy statement and action plan for community wealth building across Hertfordshire.

Climate Change

- Adopting the new Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, co-produced with the community, and supporting county-wide climate actions through the Herts Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership.

- Securing commitment from local businesses and residents through the Climate Change Business Charter and Community Pledge list.
- Developing and implementing the SBC Carbon Management Plan.

Sustainable Transport

- Refreshing the Future Town Future Transport Strategy.
- Working towards the designation of Stevenage as a 'Sustainable Transport town'.
- Delivery of sustainable transport projects included the Town Centre Regeneration Programme (permission for the bus interchange as referred to in paragraph 3.15; and scoping options for the multi-storey car park, cycle hub and cycleway improvements).
- Updating the Parking and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document and Strategy.
- Developing the options for the cycle hire scheme.

Biodiversity

- Developing Shackledell Grassland as a designated local nature reserve.
- Developing site specific hedgerow management plans.
- Protecting woodland sites through improved vertical structure in woodlands (subject to being able to work on-site in the autumn/winter months).
- Developing new orchard and grassland habitats (subject to being able to work on-site in the autumn/winter months).

Internal Facing Programmes

Financial Security Programme

3.45 Programme Outcomes

- To meet the Financial Security three year savings target
- To ensure that the General Fund expenditure equals income without the use of balances from 2022/23 onwards
- To ensure the Housing Revenue Account has sufficient funding to meet the capital needs of the Housing Asset Management Strategy and identified revenue needs
- To identify Financial Security options using the three revised workstreams (efficiency, commercial and improved processes), before recommending any service rationalisation options, as summarised below.

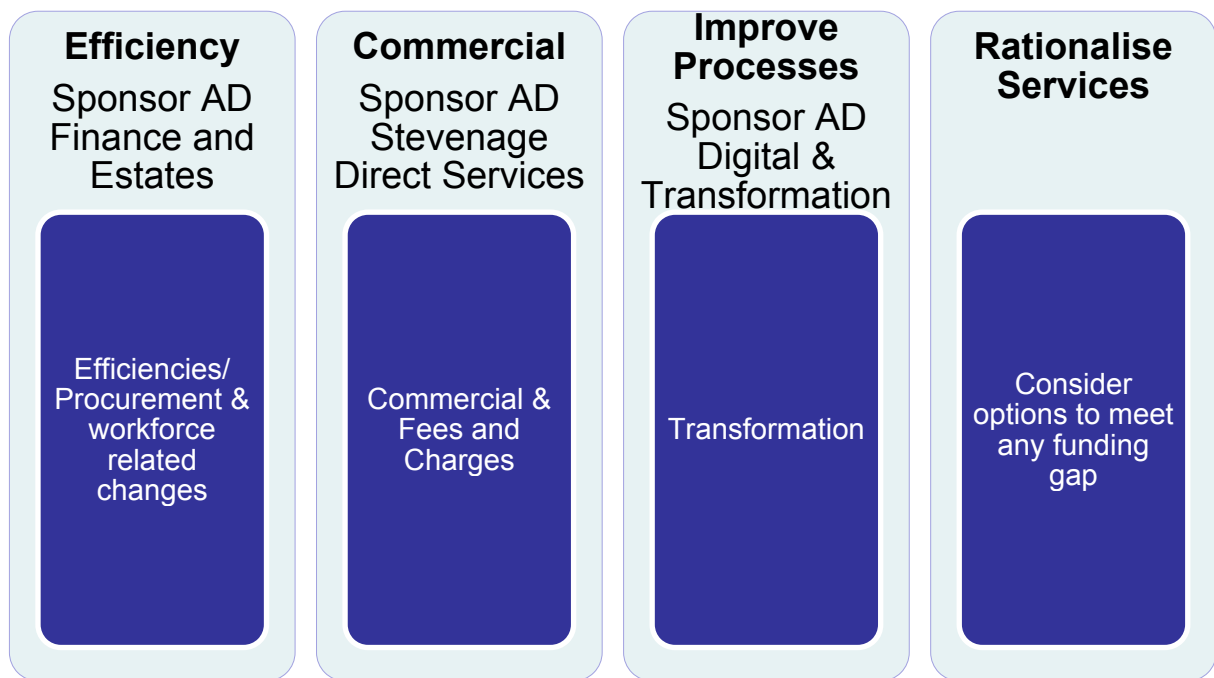


Figure 2: Financial Security workstreams

3.46 Programme Overview

3.47 This programme aims to ensure that the Council has sufficient funds available to deliver quality services that residents want and need. The Council aims to break away from the cycle of dependency on Government grant through becoming more efficient in its processes and developing new and innovative funding streams to ensure it has the resources it needs to be a Council fit for the future and build a vibrant town that residents deserve.

3.48 The Council has taken significant steps over recent years to balance its budget and one of the principle aims of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is to 'achieve an on-going balanced budget by 2022/23 by ensuring inflationary pressures are matched by increases in fees and income or reductions in expenditure'. The General Fund budget report to Council in February 2020 projected that there would be a £64,542 return to balances in 2022/23. However the report went on to state that there is a significant draw on balances through the MTFS period and a £1.4Million draw on balances between 2019/20 and 2021/22. This forecast is also reliant on identifying and delivering further savings of £778K currently unidentified for the period 2021/22-2022/23 and implementing identified savings options. Efficiency savings cannot be relied on to meet the funding gap and a transformational approach is required. The Senior Leadership Team is investigating options to meet this challenge.

3.49 Key successes during 2019/20 included:

- Approval of a Financial Security savings package for 2020/21 totalling £202,900 for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and £846,964 for the General Fund (GF), at the November Executive 2019.

- The 2020/21 HRA and General Fund (GF) budgets were agreed at Council in January and February respectively, incorporating the savings package referred to above.
- Work progressed on developing the Council's commercial and insourcing strategy and on recruiting a Commercial Manager, who has since started in post.

3.50 During 2020/21 the programme will focus on:

- Reviewing the Medium Term Financial Strategies, including assessments of the impact of Covid-19 on General Fund and HRA budgets and identification and implementation of mitigating actions.
- Identification of Financial Security options to meet the General Fund and HRA funding gap for the period 2021/22-2023/24 via the Financial Security workstreams.
- Further developing and implementing the Council's Commercial and Insourcing Strategy.
- Continuing to undertake an appraisal of the Council's assets across all Stevenage neighbourhoods, to meet the objectives of the General Fund Asset Management Strategy.
- Undertaking a Transformation Opportunity Assessment as a key first stage in the transformational approach to addressing the funding challenge.
- Identifying options to improve productivity via use of digital interventions.

Employer of Choice Programme

3.51 Programme Outcomes

- Improved employee engagement
- Right person, right place, right time - recruiting/retaining staff to hard to fill posts
- Improved managerial competency
- Improved reputation as a place to work
- Evidence of staff progressing to higher grades and new roles

3.52 Programme Overview

3.53 The Council aims to create a flexible, collaborative, creative and modern workforce to ensure it can deliver the priorities set out in the FTFC programme and give residents the standard of services they expect. This programme aims to transform the way the Council works, ensuring that staff have the skills, abilities and experience to deliver excellence. The Council must become an employer of choice so that it can compete in today's market place and attract and retain the best staff to build for the future.

3.54 Through Future Council Business Reviews, work has begun on shaping the next stage of the transformation programme to ensure the Council has the right structures, teams and people in place.

3.55 Key successes during 2019/20 included:

- Implementing the Council's Competency Framework for staff on grades 1-9.
- Enhancing the functionality of the corporate intranet.
- Launching an annual leave purchase scheme policy.
- Undertaking a learning needs analysis across all staff which will feed in to the corporate learning and organisational development strategy.
- Launching a third party sickness reporting facility for all staff to use.

3.56 During 2020/21 the programme will focus on:

- Developing a new Workforce strategy and supporting work programme to ensure that our workforce and workplace are developed and engaged to deliver our services now and in the future. The strategy will focus on ways of working, workforce communication, workforce inclusion and diversity and workforce development.
- Working closely with the business to ensure that our workforce have the appropriate skills and knowledge to deliver now and in the future.
- Preparing for new ways of working having learned from the experience of operating the services during the Covid-19 pandemic and also to prepare the council for its planned move to the public sector hub.
- A renewed focus on branding of SBC as an employer through on-boarding and external recognition.
- Continuing to support areas of the organisation as they go through business unit reviews.
- Refresh of induction and introduction of on-boarding concepts.
- Developing tools to enable staff self-service.
- Reviewing the effectiveness of the Firstcare absence management system.

Performing at our Peak Programme

3.57 **Programme Outcomes**

- The provision of high quality performance management software tools.
- Streamlined governance structures that ensure effective and timely decision making
- A strong performance culture is embedded across the organisation

3.58 **Programme Overview**

- 3.59 The Council aims to become an insightful Council with improved service performance and slimmed down decision-making processes. The programme will improve the organisation's insight, analysis and intelligence to help us to make better informed business decisions. This is being achieved through the adoption of tools to support ongoing strategic and operational analysis, along with progress towards more devolved decision making.
- 3.60 Key successes during 2019/20 included:
- Developing the Council's performance and governance system (InPhase). This included the reduction of manual data collection processes, enhancing the use of the risk management module and further developing business unit measures on the system.
 - Reviewing performance measures and targets for 2020/21 and appraising the proposed new measures from business units.
- 3.61 During 2020/21 the programme will focus on:
- Ongoing development of the use of the Inphase system
 - Reviewing the scheme of officer delegations in respect of Executive powers.

Key Business Unit Themes Update

- 3.62 A summary of highlights at the end of the financial year 2019/20 that are not already included in the FTFC programme successes above is set out in the following paragraphs across the three key delivery themes:
- Customer
 - Place
 - Transformation and Support

Customer Theme

- 3.63 The Customer Theme incorporates the following Business Units:
- Housing & Investment
 - Communities & Neighbourhoods

Housing & Investment

- 3.64 A successful event was held to celebrate 100 years of social housing. Visits were arranged with those council tenants who became 100 years old this year and also to the 100th letting. A time capsule was also buried at a new build scheme, which will be named after Christopher Addison, the minister responsible for the introduction of key housing legislation in 1919.
- 3.65 The Housing team, alongside colleagues in Stevenage Direct Services and Environmental Health, were finalists in the Chartered Institute of Housing's

“Housing Heroes” team of the year award. This was to recognise the collaborative approach taken to resolve issues at Brent Court earlier in the year.

- 3.66 The Homelessness and Housing Options team made a successful bid for the Rough Sleeper Initiative for £177,500.
- 3.67 At the end of 2019/20 the target for homelessness preventions was 360, however the team achieved 525 preventions; this is in comparison to 399 in 2018/19. This is a significant achievement but also shows increased pressure on the service.

Communities & Neighbourhoods

- 3.68 Stevenage Day marked its 60th anniversary in June 2019 and was a success, with an estimated 30,000 attendees over the course of the day. The Council’s presence was enhanced, with a central SBC village and associated Council sponsored activities.
- 3.69 The third Stevenage Cycle Festival was held in August, involving 10 different local organisations and over 50 volunteers. Over 300 participants took part in the led ride. As a consequence of the festival, Cycling UK Stevenage Branch ran an additional programme of family rides throughout the summer.
- 3.70 The play team had a successful summer, offering five weeks of playschemes at the three play centres and two holiday playschemes offering over 100 sessions for the children and young people to access. There were over 13,000 sessional attendances throughout this period.
- 3.71 The Healthy Stevenage Partnership has worked to shape the district offer with Public Health this year. The focus on young people and wellbeing has led to the formation of healthy hub proposals at a number of secondary schools in the town.
- 3.72 Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse launched its first “Safe Space” in North Hertfordshire, building on the success of the Stevenage model and further developing the Council’s partnership with North Hertfordshire District Council.
- 3.73 The Community Safety team launched a ‘Contactless Box Project’ in December in partnership with Stevenage Rotary Club. The contactless boxes allow members of the public to provide contactless donations to local homeless people, which in turn, are developed into resources for Stevenage Haven to support those accessing its services.
- 3.74 The official launch of the Cultural Strategy took place in the town square, supported by the Arts Council and coinciding with the 25th anniversary of Stevenage Festival.
- 3.75 The service secured a successful £15,000 bid to the Arts Council to develop an interactive installation on the cycle network/identified underpass.
- 3.76 Over £100k of external investment has been secured for the town since the launch of the Arts and Heritage Strategy and future plans for Arts and Heritage will feature in regeneration plans moving forwards.

Place Theme

3.77 The Place Theme incorporates the following Business Units:

- Planning and Regulation
- Stevenage Direct Services
- Regeneration
- Housing Development

(The Regeneration and Housing Development Business Units are primarily focused on delivery of the Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration and Housing Development Programmes of FTFC. Delivery updates for these programmes are summarised in paragraphs 3.14 and 3.19 respectively.)

Planning and Regulation

- 3.78 After over a decade in the making in May 2019, the Council adopted its new Local Plan for Stevenage. The Plan sets the planning policies up until 2031 for 7,600 new homes and space for over 2,000 new jobs; a revitalised town centre; 3 new sustainable neighbourhoods with the protection of our green infrastructure.
- 3.79 The Council agreed to introduce CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) from the 1st of April 2020. The CIL will be a mandatory floor space charge on new development in the borough, which would be used to fund key infrastructure to support growth in Stevenage.
- 3.80 The Environmental Health and Licensing team supported businesses to comply with health, hygiene and safety regulations, protecting our residents and staff.
- 3.81 Planning applications continued to be determined within corporate and statutory targets.
- 3.82 At the Business Technology Centre, a total of 72 new jobs were created and there were 57 new business start-ups during the year.

Stevenage Direct Services (SDS)

- 3.83 Green Flag Awards were successfully retained for Fairlands Valley Park, Town Centre Gardens and Hampson Park. An award was also attained for Shephalbury Park for the first time.
- 3.84 The Green Space volunteers collectively gave over 1,100 hours to help with maintenance of the Town Centre Gardens and delivery of Biodiversity Action Plan activities.
- 3.85 A Recycling Bag Pilot was launched, where 270 households were invited to participate in a pilot for the use of recycling bags in place of the current plastic boxes provided. The new recycling bags are now being provided in place of the old boxes. Constructive feedback has been received, and will be used to inform future specifications.

- 3.86 A community orchard in Mobbsbury Park has been restored and extended following works by the SDS Management team and Green Space Volunteers. A new 'People's Orchard' has been created on open space in Symonds Green. With supervision from SDS staff, SLT helped to clear scrub from Poplars Meadow (a local wildlife site).
- 3.87 Repairs have been fixed promptly and time taken to complete them continues to be better than the target level. The team have placed major focus on a case management approach to each case dealt with. This, coupled with efforts to review and improve processes, has improved performance and productivity.

Transformation and Support Theme

- 3.88 The Transformation and Support Theme incorporates the following Business Units:
- Digital and Transformation
 - Corporate Services
 - Finance and Estates

Digital and Transformation

Customer Services

- 3.89 The new integrated digital solution Firmstep was implemented in Customer Services. It has also enabled the swift implementation of an appointment based service for face-to-face interactions.
- 3.90 Customer satisfaction with the CSC was 90% at the end of the year, up from 88.5% in 2018/19.

Technology

- 3.91 The joint ICT strategy has been given final approval from both councils (Stevenage Borough Council and East Herts Council). This will ensure a united vision for the IT service over the next three years.
- 3.92 A new email and website security software has been implemented. This has improved the Council's security regarding all email and web traffic.
- 3.93 Azure AD has been implemented, which is the first step to applying the Council's network for the 'Cloud'. This has enabled the IT team to start applying 'Single Sign On' (SSO) for a number of applications.
- 3.94 Laptops have been procured and deployed for Members. This will help enable Members to take advantage of the new video conferencing facilities in place as well as providing flexible working benefits.
- 3.95 Due to the impact of Coronavirus, IT enabled staff to work from home where they could do. On average 500 staff have been using remote access at any one time during the working day since lockdown came into effect.

Finance and Estates

- 3.96 The Revenues and Benefits service exceeded targets for Council Tax collection rates during 2019/20.
- 3.97 The percentage of non-domestic rates due for the financial year received by the authority has exceeded target throughout the year.
- 3.98 The time taken to process housing benefit new claims and change events has been significantly better than target for the majority of 2019/20.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

Annual Report Purpose and Content

- 4.1 The Annual Report 2019/20 (Appendix A) emphasises the co-operative approach of the Council to service design and delivery. It highlights how the Council has been able to continue to meet the needs of the community despite the tough economic challenges the Council has faced and it outlines the progress against the transformation programme Future Town Future Council.
- 4.2 The document reflects on the achievements against the Corporate Plan 'Our Co-operative Council: Future Town Future Council' over the last year as well as giving a brief summary of what the Council aims to achieve in the forthcoming year to deliver the Corporate Plan, supporting the annual review of outcomes and priorities.
- 4.3 The Senior Leadership team and Service Managers have been consulted to determine the appropriate content and to suggest the key achievements for the Annual Report.
- 4.4 The Annual Report will be published on the Council's website and will be promoted through social media and the Chronicle magazine.

FTFC Programme Deliverables

- 4.5 As explained in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.9, officers have conducted a review of the Future Town Future Council Co-operative Corporate Plan programme for the coming year and have engaged with Executive Members and the Opposition Group Leaders via informal briefings, to help shape its direction. This review has formed the basis of the 2020/21 FTFC deliverables that are contained in this Executive report and summarised in the Annual Report 2019/20. The FTFC programme will also play a pivotal role in supporting the delivery of the recovery plans that are proposed in a separate report to this Executive meeting.
- 4.6 The range of projects proposed for 2020/21 represent an ambitious programme of work, particularly given the challenges faced in relation to the Covid-19 situation and, associated to this, the Council's General Fund and

Housing Revenue Account financial position. There remains considerable uncertainty as a result of these challenges and it will therefore be necessary to keep the deliverability of the FTFC programme under review during the course of the year. Any resultant changes to the FTFC deliverables for 2020/21 will be reported to the Executive through the quarterly Corporate Performance Reports.

Council Performance Measures 2020/21

- 4.7 The impact of the broad transformation being applied across the Council has been considered when determining appropriate measures to monitor performance throughout 2020/21.
- 4.8 The full suite of 2020/21 measures and targets can be seen in Appendix B. The flexibility of the Council's approach to performance management enables the Senior Leadership Team to amend performance measures and targets in year to drive forward additional improvement in services and to reflect changes in structures and approach where appropriate. In this regard, once the Corporate Landlord Review is completed, a new suite of measures will be introduced relating to that function. A review into the approach to the CSC may also lead to further changes to performance measures associated with that service. The Executive will be advised of any new measures to be included in the corporate performance suite as a result of these reviews, through future quarterly performance reports.
- 4.9 Towards the end of Quarter 4 of 2019/20, Covid-19 began to impact on performance across many council services and the continued impact and uncertainty presents difficulty in terms of setting realistic targets for 2020/21. In view of these exceptional circumstances, officers propose that most performance targets should be set in line with the targets for the equivalent period last year. The remainder (where appropriate) will be set based on the actual outturn figures for 2019/20.
- 4.10 In addition, alongside this corporate performance suite, the Council will also develop with its partners a supplementary dashboard of measures to identify the impact of Covid-19 and the Stevenage recovery effort. This will be created and monitored through the Stevenage Co-operative Recovery Taskforce and the Recovery Co-ordination Board and will be reported within the quarterly recovery progress updates to the Executive (the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Incident Update Report & Recovery Plan report to this Executive meeting refers).

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.1.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for improvement activity identified will need to identify and consider any future resourcing needs.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 There are no direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for improvement activity identified will need to identify and consider any resulting legal implications.

5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.3.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed for the Corporate Plan Our Co-operative Council: Future Town Future Council. This helped to determine any negative, positive or disproportionate impact our outcomes and priorities might have on people in terms of their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken in respect of individual programmes and services referred to in this report as appropriate.

5.4 Risk Implications

5.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). However, there is a risk to FTFC programme delivery as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

5.4.2 The Council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the Council's objectives and internal control processes and also provides good governance assurance. Risks to individual FTFC programmes and projects will be kept under review through this approach.

5.5 Other Corporate implications

5.5.1 The Council's Corporate Plan is the keystone in the Council's policy framework. It sets out the Council's strategic priorities and informs the corporate improvement and change programmes.

5.5.2 The Corporate Plan impacts on some Council services and its priorities should be reflected in all relevant Business Unit planning processes.

5.5.3 The Annual report 2019/20 highlights the Council's co-operative approach to services. It ensures the Council continues not only to communicate its improvement priorities and co-operative vision to the people of Stevenage, but also to listen, engage and involve them in the realisation of this joint vision.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- [Council Corporate Plan: Our Co-operative Council; Future Town Future Council December 2016 Council](#)
- [Executive Report September 2019](#) - Corporate Performance for Quarter 1
- [Executive Report December 2019](#) - Corporate Performance for Quarter 2
- [Executive Report March 2020](#) - Corporate Performance for Quarter 3
- [Executive Report June 2020](#) - Corporate Performance for Quarter 4
- [Executive Report June 2020](#) - Coronavirus Recovery Plan - Review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Impact of Covid-19 on the Council's General Fund Revenue Budget

APPENDICES

- A Appendix A: Council Annual Report 2019/20 **[TO FOLLOW]**
- B Appendix B: Corporate Performance Suite and Targets 2020/21