

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL 2020/21 ANNUAL REPORT



Co-operative Councils
Innovation Network

Ste✓**venage**
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Another successful year for Stevenage



Sharon Taylor – Leader, Stevenage Borough Council

Welcome to our 2020/21 Annual Report, which showcases the past year's achievements and outlines our priorities for 2021/22. In another successful year, we are proud to have achieved so much in the face of such challenging times.

One of many highlights has been Stevenage Development Board's success in attracting £37.5m new funding to deliver the Town Investment Plan. This is a great example of partnership working which will provide a real boost to support our ambitious programme of work to transform Stevenage town centre. If you have visited the town centre recently you will be aware that this programme is very much off and away with more exciting developments opening up soon.

Listening to and working with you is fundamental to our ethos as a co-operative council and it ensures our plans meet your expectations and needs. This is central to our new Co-operative Neighbourhoods initiative, which launched this year and aims to develop a locally based approach to shaping services and ensuring our neighbourhoods are safe, clean and green places in which to live.

Throughout the year we have worked hard to protect services and to support our community and local businesses, in response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. During 2021/22 we will continue to strive to deliver our key priorities and lead on vital work with partners to support the economic and social recovery of the Town.



Matt Partridge, Chief Executive - Stevenage Borough Council

Over the past year, we have made significant progress in delivering our ambitious Co-operative 'Future Town Future Council' programme, which aims to reform and revitalise both the town and the council for the 21st century.

Substantial investment continues in regenerating the town centre, delivering new social and affordable homes and improving council homes. With a strong commitment to supporting and valuing our communities, we are delivering a wealth of health and wellbeing, cultural, community safety and environmental initiatives, working co-operatively with a wide range of partners.

Two new strategies agreed this year - focussing on climate change and community wealth building - will help drive forward our commitments to achieving net zero carbon emissions in Stevenage and to supporting jobs, skills and opportunities for local people.

The achievements in this report would not have been possible without the dedication of our staff – I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our officer team for their commitment and for keeping council services and Future Town Future Council delivery going during one of the toughest years we have ever known.

COVID and our Co-operative Council Response

The effects of the pandemic have required the Council to quickly adapt services to provide support for residents and businesses and to manage the impacts of the pandemic.

We can't do this alone - Partnership working and working with communities is key to our recovery and all the work we do to support our community.

The pandemic has had significant impacts on our residents and businesses in the town, which is reflected in areas of increasing demand or pressures in different service areas such as homelessness support and advice, Council Tax and Housing Benefits, income and rents, and the capacity of Environmental Health team who have played a leading role in Local Outbreak Management.

We established a community response team to provide support to vulnerable residents in need during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Service set up within
3 days

Assisted over
500 residents
with referrals or help and advice

190 households
received a food pack

137 households
received fresh food packs

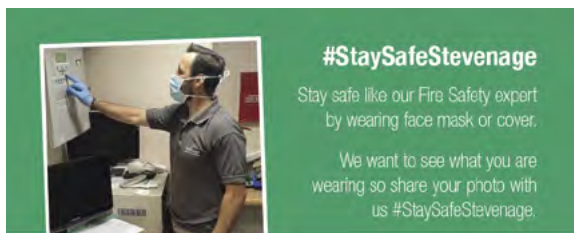
62 households
received a personal care pack

57 households
received cleaning packs

3 Covid Marshalls recruited

Distributed over **15,000**
free re-usable face masks and

750 bottles of
hand sanitisers



#StaySafeStevenage

Stay safe like our Fire Safety expert by wearing face mask or cover.

We want to see what you are wearing so share your photo with us #StaySafeStevenage.

Stevenage
borough council

Covid cobra was a community led project with the painted stones making their way down Grace Way – funding was given from the Stevenage Works community chest fund and we are now supporting finding a permanent home for the snake.



We launched our **#StaySafeStevenage** social media campaign to raise awareness and promote social distancing and COVID safety measures.

Our Local Outbreak team dealt with:

310
service requests
 including complaints
 and requests for advice.

Self-isolation
 checks - around
65
checks
 on cases self
 isolating per
 month.

11 **Pavement**
Licences
 issued; advice given to
16 **businesses.**

103 **COVID**
Secure audits
 and
760
engagement
 visits with businesses.

The team have
 investigated
10
 cluster/outbreak
 notifications.

Joint area checks with
 Herts Police visiting over
200
businesses.

Contact tracing for
182 **residents**
 of Stevenage since December 2020.



We implemented measures
 to make our Town centre
COVID secure
 this included new signs and
 markings to ensure social
 distancing.

Independent Living Schemes

We attended
7,025
emergency calls
 to those living in independent
 Living and Flexicare schemes
 and on our Careline alarm
 service (**4,520** Independent
 Living/Flexicare & **2,505**
 Careline).



We completed
20,506
 visits to those living in
 Independent Living/
 Flexicare and on our
 community Support Service.

We completed
65,480
 calls to those living in
 Independent Living/Flexicare
 and on our Community
 Support Service.

We provided emergency accommodation to
77 people
 who were rough sleepers or at risk of rough sleeping

**The No More
 SERVICE**

Whilst here, they were offered the use of the No More Service in a bid to maintain their accommodation and make positive changes to their wellbeing and lifestyle. Further to this, the service increased all contact to clients to either daily or bi-weekly. In turn, this meant the number of clients using the service increased by **157%**.

Of those who wanted to engage from the Covid Provision Accommodation we saw a:

- 96%**
reduction in offending
- 76%**
reduced risk to their housing
- 84%**
improvements to their physical and mental health

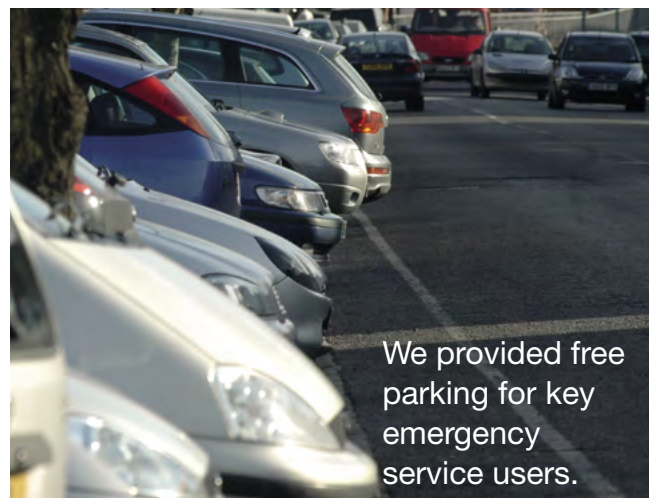
Weekly bulletins

We sent to businesses in the town to offer advice and support.

Our Revenues and Benefits team have processed approximately

£21M in business rate reliefs and just under

£20M of business grants.



We provided free parking for key emergency service users.



Our staff supported the mass vaccination centre at Robertson House.



Unlike some local authority areas we maintained all household refuse and recycling collections during the lockdown.

SLL

We worked closely with our leisure contractor and supported their efforts to secure funding to protect and maintain our wonderful leisure facilities.

Transforming Our Town



The SG1 planning application was approved, leaving Mace clear to proceed with the development.

STEVENAGE BETTER a place for everyone

The Stevenage Development Board of which SBC is a core member worked together to produce a Town Investment Plan and bid for government funding. The successful plan secured funding of

£37.5million

This is a phenomenal achievement which will aid our efforts to bring about a once in a generation investment within our town.

Our **£50m** **Queensway North scheme** has neared completion, despite the pandemic, with the first of the three residential blocks now available to view. We have also welcomed a range of new businesses to the area including Cakebox, PureGym, Chateau Café and a new restaurant, with more to follow.



We are in the process of developing a new bus interchange on the corner of the Leisure Centre that will provide a significant upgrade on the existing station. It will improve accessibility across the town and travel links with the expanded railway station as well as offering new heated, covered waiting facilities and amenities including a cafe.

We have created...

45,520ft²

Public Spaces

30,000ft²

Office Space

79,000ft²

Retail Space and

33 new jobs

were created at the Business and Technology Centre.



Work is underway improving the North Block (the site of Starbucks, Greggs, Subway) which will provide new retail, commercial and flexible office space.



Through the **Stevenage Works Board** which includes **SBC, North Herts College** and **Job Centre+** we secured **£340k** from the Construction Industry Training Board to establish the Hertfordshire Construction Hub which will provide training and employment opportunities for local people linked to our town centre and housing projects.



Improvements have been made to our town square including new paving, granite benches, and more. Bespoke streetlights, with festoon lighting on the trees and surrounding structures help to create a really attractive new area and event space.

We've started work on a **'Stevenage Gateway'** area action plan to help improve and connect the railway station to the rest of the town centre.

We published our **Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP)** – this aims to identify the infrastructure required to support future levels of growth across Stevenage.

We now have a dedicated member of staff dealing with the contributions developers make towards future spending on infrastructure to benefit Stevenage.

We have adopted a new **Developer Contributions planning commitment** which details how developers will support infrastructure. This includes funding for primary schools and highways improvements as well as employment opportunities and apprenticeships for local residents.

Next year we will:

- Begin work on Phase 1 of the SG1 regeneration programme
- Deliver the Queensway North Development
- Complete work on our Town Square and new North Block
- Open our new Bus Interchange
- Develop business cases and plans to implement the £37.5m Towns Fund programme for Stevenage
- Support plans for a thriving life sciences cluster in Stevenage
- Produce a Stevenage Design Guide that will set out clear design principles to guide future development in Stevenage

More Social and Affordable Homes

We have granted permission for new homes and driven forward our own house building programme.

We have granted planning permission for the delivery of

782 new homes of all

tenures in Stevenage with permissions

on a **further 2,914**

new homes in progress.

The team has also been successful in securing grant funding **to help prevent people becoming homeless**, with a total of

£1.03m

being made available.



9 new homes

at Addison House. The completed homes will bring the total number of new social and affordable homes provided by the council to **270 since 2015**.



10 private sale homes

at Ditchmore Lane were delivered and the sale of these will help us re-invest in other developments in the town.

The team has been successful in its grant funding application to Homes England for accelerated construction grant. This will bring in **approximately £500K in additional funds** for building council homes.

This financial year we have received a total of **£3.6m through sales and grant funding** as part of the Council's Housing Development Programme.



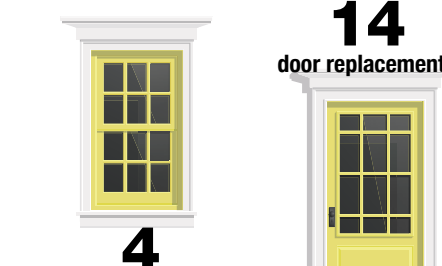
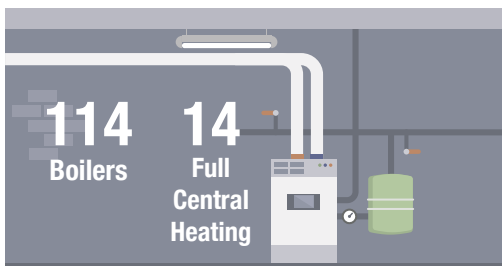
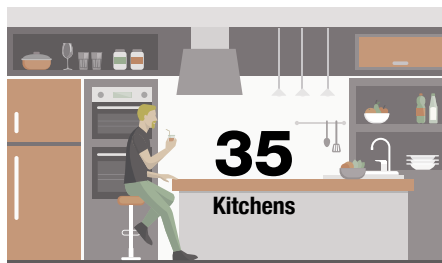
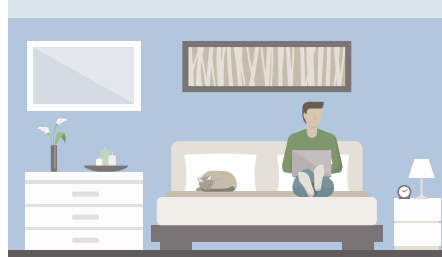
Work has begun onsite on the Kenilworth Close scheme which will provide **over 200 homes** including a flagship older persons housing scheme.

Next year we will:

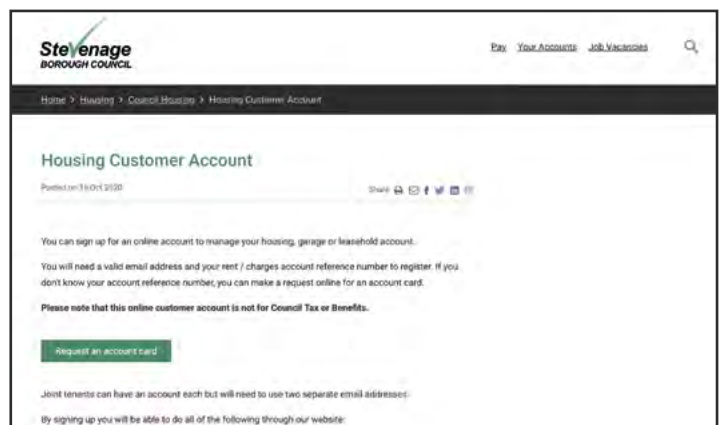
- Deliver 21 new homes at North Road
- Deliver 29 new homes at Symonds Green
- Continue to deliver the regeneration of Kenilworth Close - by the end of 2021/ 22 we will have completed the Malvern Close element of the site, as well as the first homes at site A4 (bordering Stirling Close)
- Develop a pipeline of new homes to 2025/26
- Consider the planning application for the West of Stevenage which, if granted by the Council's Planning and Development Committee, could provide 1,500 new homes of all tenures for the town as well as the provision of a new primary school and neighbourhood centre

Managing and Improving Our Homes

Through our Major Works contracts we completed the following:



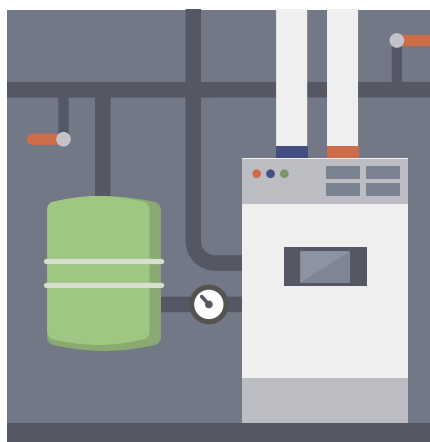
Mulalley & Wates are also committed to making a positive social impact on our community – from sourcing local supplies and providing local jobs and training, to volunteering on community projects and donating to local charities.



Our Housing for **Older People Strategy** was approved which will help enable healthy ageing for older people in Stevenage through the provision of a new housing and support offer.

We launched our **housing online account** for our housing tenants. This single account allows tenants to do more themselves including accessing several services such as making payments, applying for housing and reporting and, in the future, tracking repairs.

Managing and Improving Our Homes



The Replacement and Renewal of Communal Heating Systems project which covers **15 sheltered housing blocks** is underway with 8 blocks already completed.

We launched our “**Housing First**” approach which focuses on the importance of providing access to safe, secure accommodation for homeless people and the role it can play in allowing them to move forward in their lives.



Our

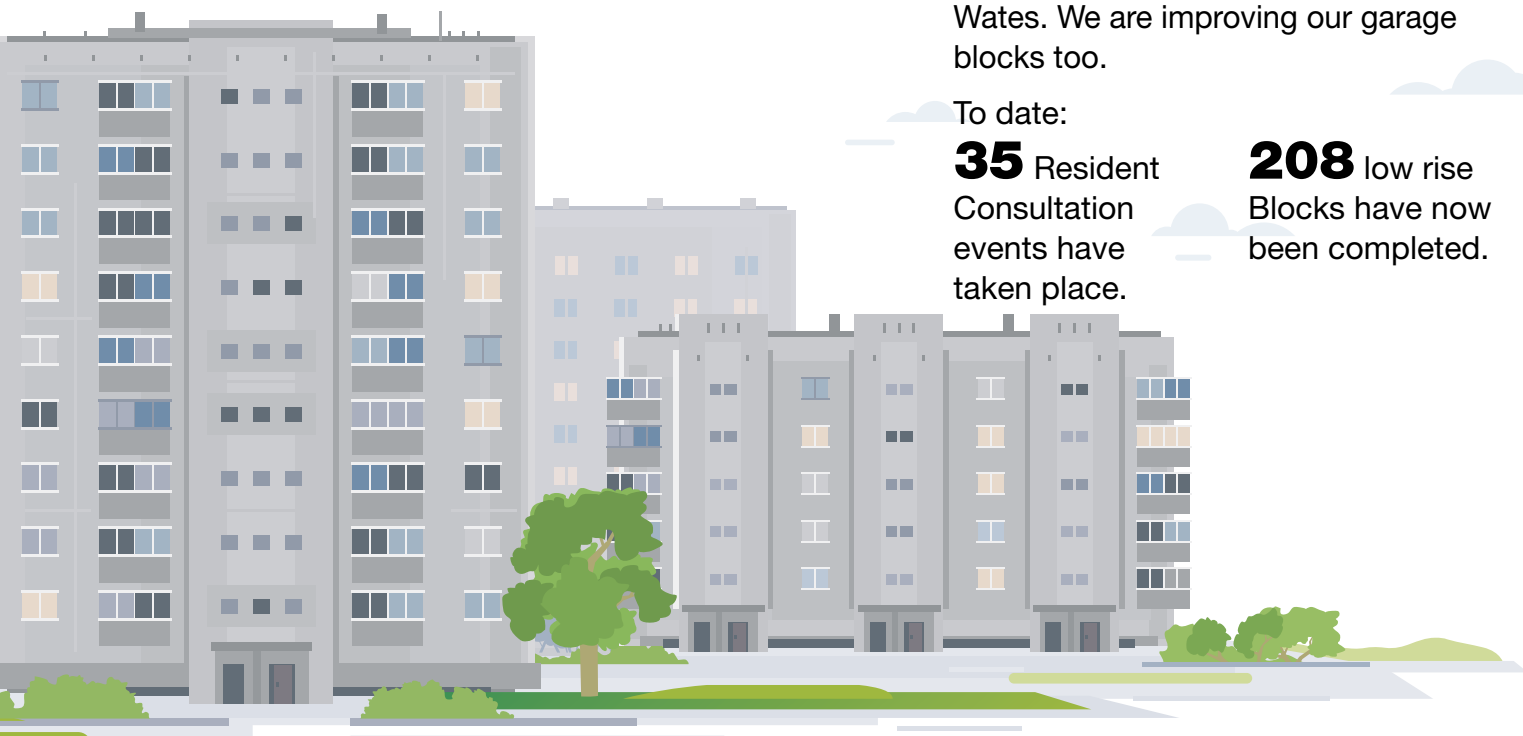
£45m five year major flatblock refurbishment programme has been progressed through our contractors Mulalley and Wates. We are improving our garage blocks too.

To date:

35 Resident Consultation events have taken place.

208 low rise Blocks have now been completed.

Since the start of our project to re-new the lifts in our flat blocks **12 lifts** have been completed.



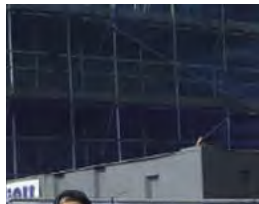
Next year we will:

- Commence Phase Three of our major flat block refurbishment programme (MRC)
- Continue to refurbish the lifts in our flat blocks
- Begin works on fitting sprinklers to residential buildings over 18 metres in height as well as other associated fire safety works
- Deliver more homes and support through our Housing First project
- Continue to work on the actions identified in our Housing for Older People Strategy

Working Co-operatively Within Our Neighbourhoods

Our Co-operative Neighbourhoods (CN) programme was launched in late summer 2020 and aims to put residents at the heart of decision making by making services more responsive to the strengths, needs and aspirations of communities and localities.

The Neighbourhood Wardens are now also focussing on working in specific areas of the town to patrol and offer reassurance, be visible in the neighbourhoods and help tackle issues such as fly tipping and dog fouling.



We are pulling together a range of public data and information from different sources to make sure we have evidence to help inform what work is being done in our neighbourhoods.

It also helps us to **plan for future engagement activities**, tackle identified issues and further develop the council's services on a local level.



The neighbourhood-based teams are working co-operatively with residents, ward members and local businesses to shape the services in their area.

The community development officers have continued to offer support to the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector by signposting to government funding, helping with bid writing for further grants, and maintaining regular contact throughout the pandemic to help problem solve as they begin to return to business as usual.

Next year we will:

- Complete Community plans for each of the 6 neighbourhoods, informed by local communities
- Support residents in becoming more active members of their community who make a positive contribution to the town and local area
- Increase and enhance volunteering within the Council
- Work with our voluntary sector partners to support funding bids to help with recovery from the pandemic
- Continue to offer support to Community Associations to aid recovery
- Continue to review our community buildings across the neighbourhood areas through the Locality Review Programme
- Deliver the Housing and Garage Major Improvement Programmes to improve the quality of council homes and garages

A Clean and Green Town

Our Climate Change Strategy was adopted in September 2020 – with a rolling Climate Change Action Plan to take forward our aspirations to reach net zero carbon emissions for the town by 2030.

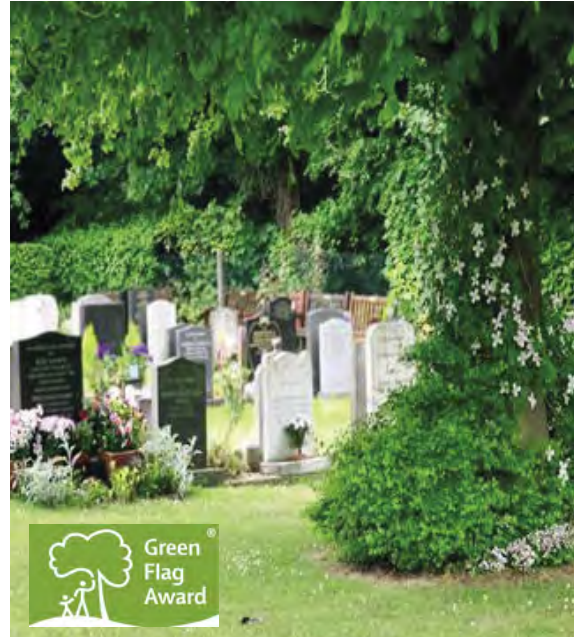


We have reduced our carbon outputs by

over

5,600,00kgs

by switching to a zero carbon electricity provider.



Weston Road Cemetery achieved a Green Flag Award, bringing the total to **5 sites** in Stevenage.



Our Cemetery Policy and Amenity Tree Management Policy were developed and approved.

We adopted a new Parking and Sustainable Transport planning commitment which will help us promote walking, cycling and public transport in the town.





Community Orchards

were planted at Hampson Park, The Donkey Park and Wellfield open space.



New planters and shrub beds were installed in partnership with **Waste Not Want Not** and **LCB** funding from councillors.



We had around **550 hours volunteered** by our green space volunteers.



Green Space Volunteers

Green Space Volunteers planted a further acre of tree saplings to extend the Memorial Wood in Fairlands Valley Park, thanks to **donations of 450 trees** from one of our contractors Wates.

We adopted a new

Biodiversity planning

commitment which ensures developments in the town provide an “net gain” in biodiversity either on-site or through support for elsewhere in the borough.

Next year we will:

- Implement our action plan for climate change
- Develop a new Waste Strategy that will set out future plans for waste and recycling
- Develop ‘clean and green’ targeted initiatives and enforcement campaigns in neighbourhoods pro-actively tackling issues such as fly-tipping, littering and dog fouling
- Improve play areas in Symonds Green and Manor, following consultation with children and young people
- Continue to increase the areas that we manage as grassland meadows in order to support wildlife
- Continue to promote cycling and walking and seek funding for infrastructure improvements

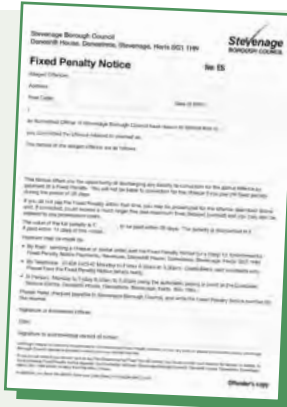
A Safe Town

We continue to work closely with our partners to keep our residents safe. As a result, we have seen fantastic achievements through our Community Safety team.

We served

7

Fixed Penalty Notices.



We served

25 Community Protection Notice warnings and

17 Community Protection Notices for anti-social behaviour (ASB).

We investigated

556

reports of fly-tipping.



30 Adult safeguarding referrals

(down by 33 on last year)

22 cases were closed following successful intervention, 11 of which had been opened during this year.

86 Child safeguarding referrals

(down by 7 on last year)

26 cases were closed following successful intervention, 9 of which had been opened during this year.

The No More SERVICE

128 new referrals to the No More Service this year

This year we received a rating of **100% satisfaction** from clients

On average, each month we have

56 active clients

In April 2020, in the height of the pandemic, we had **3x** more referrals than any other time.

Environmental Health



Investigated **664** noise complaints, compared to **397** the previous year.

Made **two seizures** of noise equipment and carried out two successful prosecutions for noise nuisance.

Served **39** statutory notices in relation to noise and housing issues.

Next year we will:

- Introduce a No More Youth Service to help divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB
- Develop the work of the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse Service to provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery



22

SADA safe spaces were provided and we have supported

33

families this year with safe space accommodation.

SADA

will be a county-wide service from April 2021.

There were

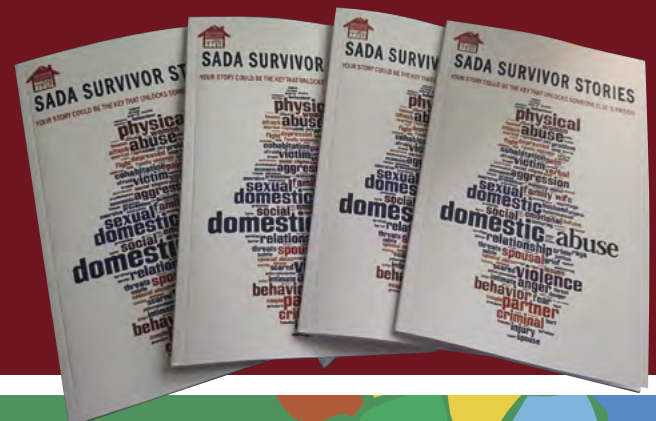
785

SADA referrals including

61 male victims that have come forward.

We secured over **£200k** of grant funding to support the SADA service.

We published SADA Survivor Stories as an E-book and a hard copy on Amazon.



- Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime
- Develop new initiatives to tackle emerging community safety issues such as the safety of women and girls
- Establish a new and co-ordinated approach to tackle environmental offences

A Thriving Town



Young People's Healthy Hub (YPHH) launched – lots of activities and information for young people including a dedicated counselling service for young people

11-16 years old.

We held

3 town centre events

virtually including our Halloween Trail, and Christmas Light Switch on.



744

residents participated,

8 case studies publicised,

40 social media posts,

47 sessions delivered.



The Play team gave out over:

2,600

activity packs

435

Food parcels

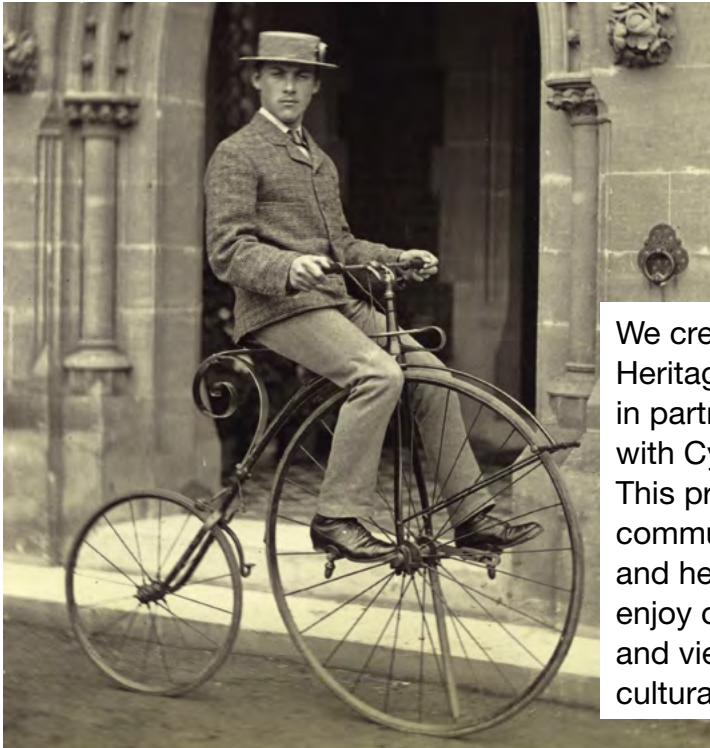
580

Easter eggs

1,507

Picnics given out during summer and October





Virtual cycling festival - five virtual rides were created gaining over



500 views

We created a Heritage Bike Ride in partnership with Cycling UK. This provided the community with a safe and healthy way to enjoy our cycle ways and view some of our cultural sites.

Virtual events

Virtual Holocaust Memorial Day

740

Facebook views.

Virtual Stevenage Day

Our first virtual event was watched by over

2,000 viewers.

Remembrance Sunday

Livestreamed with

202 watching

live and people re-watching

1,500 times.

Pride Awards Virtual

Watched by

7,329

viewers.



Our Museum is now virtual

– you can now take a tour of the exhibits and find out more about the rich culture of Stevenage.




A welcoming space

for exhibitions, workshops, poetry events and more opened in the town centre, thanks to a partnership between the council and Junction 7 Creatives.

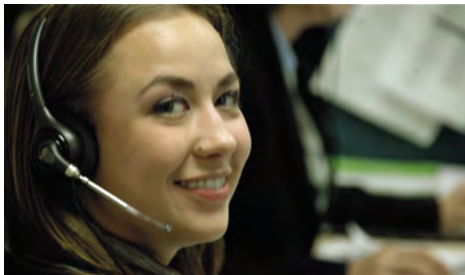
Next year we will:

- Launch the Diabetes Prevention Service through the Healthy Hub
- Progress plans for the development of the Young People’s Healthy Hub
- Continue work with sport and physical activity partners to tackle obesity
- Work with mental health partners to tackle mental ill health and social isolation
- Undertake a visioning exercise for the future offer of leisure and culture across the town
- Develop plans and activities for a new museum
- Deliver an Arts & Heritage programme including the 75th New Town anniversary and the delivery of Creative Use Schemes and arts and heritage trails

Making Your Money Count



We launched our new look council website with over **5.5million** page views in the first year, compared to **3.2million** the previous year.



In the Customer Service Centre we have:

Handled **154,304** calls

Dealt with **10,986** emails

Helped with **1,104** social media enquiries

1,448 face to face appointments

Satisfaction with CSC **96%**

For every **£1** of your Council tax, we receive **12p** towards the cost of delivering over 100 services.



Social Media



Over **8,900** followers
Over **8,400** likes



Over **9,500** followers



Over **2,300** followers

We launched our **Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy** which

will help us look at options to bring services back “in house” and explore commercial opportunities such as advertising and selling our services.

We launched our Workforce strategy that will build an **empowered and engaged workforce** to deliver exceptional services to our residents and community.

The council won a **Gold Achievement** award for the quality of data being provided to the National Address Gazetteer, a joint initiative from the Local Government Association and Ordnance Survey.



Next year we will:

- Look at further innovative ways to identify efficiencies to help us continue to deliver the essential services our residents desire whilst also balancing our budget
- Identify opportunities to generate income for the Council to re-invest in our services
- Look at bringing more services online to improve our self-service offer for our customers
- Implement our Workforce Strategy action plan
- Look at opportunities to transform how we deliver our services to both boost our productivity and enable more residents to access what they wish to when they wish too

Covid Recovery in Stevenage

Our Council and Town Recovery Plans were signed off by the Executive in July 2020.



Stevenage together is acting as a recovery task force for the coming year and will be focussing on these themes.



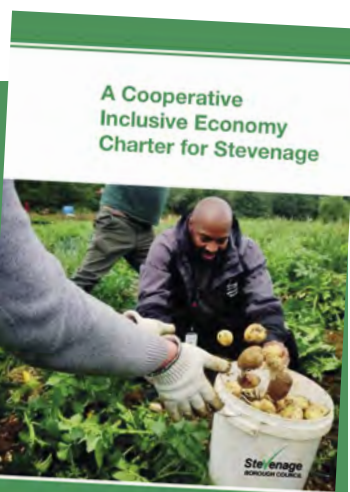
We will continue to make use of government funding to **support business recovery and resilience**

– our Covid-19 Business Support Programme is helping businesses re-open and remain open in our High St, Town Centre and Community Neighbourhoods, with free information, webinars, videos and downloadable resources – for more information see www.stevenageportal.co.uk

Our recovery efforts will continue to focus on work to **transform the town centre**, create more social and affordable homes, ensure our communities benefit from opportunity in their local economy, support people’s physical and mental wellbeing, and bring forward a green future.

We have launched our **Co-operative and Inclusive Economy Charter**

which is our commitment to strengthening the local economy by stopping money leaking out of the area. Local residents and business can sign up to the pledge to the Charter by committing to things such as using local goods and services or providing work placements and apprenticeships to local people.



- We continue to look at how our contractors can contribute more to the town by:
- supporting social and community projects,
 - providing apprenticeships and jobs for local people and
 - using local suppliers



We recently re-established the **Stevenage Economy Taskforce** with a focus

on business advice and support, skills, jobs matching and employment opportunities for residents. This includes helping local people to upskill and retrain, as well as ensuring businesses are supported to meet future skills needs, whilst encouraging young people into education, employment and training.



A Post Covid Sport and Leisure Summit will take place to help residents to boost their health and wellbeing by promoting opportunities to get involved in movement, sport, physical activities and wellbeing opportunities across the town.

We have supported workshops that addressed racial inequality, including its impact on health for **BAME communities**.



Through our **equalities commission** we will increase our understanding about the make up of our town, the needs of our communities and the barriers that exist. This will help to identify how we can make services more fair and accessible and open to all.

We were successful in receiving funding from the government of over

£1.38M to help recovery

of our leisure facilities such as the theatre, leisure centre and swimming pool.

Next year we will:

- Continue to refresh and implement the Covid-19 recovery plans for the town and Council
- Develop and implement proposals for the Stevenage Economy Taskforce to help create jobs and skills opportunities for local people