

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** All  
**Date** 15 September 2021



## CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER ONE 2021/22

### KEY DECISION

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### 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To highlight the Council's performance across key priorities and themes for quarter one 2021/22.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes for quarter one 2021/22, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
- 2.2 That the continued impacts of COVID-19 on the homelessness preventions service and actions to recover are noted (para 3.60 to 3.74)

- 2.3 That the issues with sheltered voids and void loss are noted and plans to improve performance are endorsed (para 3.75 to 3.86)
- 2.4 That issues with asbestos and the letting of council garages and the planned measures to improve performance are noted. (para 3.91 to 3.98)
- 2.5 That work with the BTC to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 is monitored (para 3.89 to 3.90).
- 2.6 That work to investigate issues with late complaint closures continues and actions are implemented to ensure complaints are dealt with in a timely manner (para 3.99 to 3.106).
- 2.7 That issues with satisfaction of the Council website are monitored and issues are addressed utilising the new customer feedback panel (para 3.123 to 3.125).
- 2.8 That challenges within the Customer Service Centre are noted and improvement plans endorsed (para 3.107 to 3.122)

### 3 BACKGROUND

#### Future Town Future Council Programme

- 3.1 Members approved the FTFC Cooperative Corporate Plan in December 2016. This sets the Council's focus on cooperative working and outlines the key outcomes and priorities for the town through the Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) Programme as seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Future Town, Future Council Programme

- 3.2 At the Council meeting on 24 February 2021, Council agreed to continue with the current Co-operative Corporate Plan beyond the original 5 year term, subject to further review in autumn 2022.

- 3.3 At its meeting on 14 July 2021, the Executive agreed the deliverables for each of the five FTFC programmes. The town and Council's recovery plans, which have very strong synergies with the corporate plan was separately agreed on 8 July 2020. Progress against the agreed actions is summarised within this report.
- 3.4 'The Council published its Annual Report for 2020/2021, in July 2021. A copy is available online: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/plans-and-performance/annual-report>
- 3.5 This report highlights and showcases the Council's achievements in a challenging context and outlines its priorities for 2021/22. The report highlighted a number of successes and achievements from the year, including the construction of the new bus interchange, the development of Queensway North, and the Town Square and securing a £37.5m Towns Fund allocation to support the delivery of the Town Centre Transformation programme.
- 3.6 The Annual Report also set out some of vital work undertaken through the pandemic, providing emergency accommodation to 77 people at risk of rough sleeping, supporting businesses and residents through our Local Outbreak team, and supporting hundreds of vulnerable residents via the Stevenage Helps Hub.
- 3.7 The Report also highlighted the ongoing work to build over 270 new Council homes to date, and invest in housing stock via the Major Repairs Contract and other vital works to Council homes. Stevenage Council teams have adapted and worked hard to maintain service delivery, maintaining over 5 million square metres of grass, achieving five green flag awards for our parks, and 33,500kg of waste collected over the last year, and putting in place a Cooperative Neighbourhood programme to work with residents to improve local areas.

### **Customer, Place and Transformation and Support**

- 3.8 In addition to monitoring progress on the delivery of the FTFC Programme, performance across all Council services is monitored throughout the year to highlight achievements and identify any areas for improvement.
- 3.9 A complete set of performance measures aligned to both service delivery and the FTFC programme delivery is attached as Appendix One. Summaries of performance measure results are outlined at paragraph (para 3.58).
- 3.10 Towards the end of Quarter 4 2019/20, Covid-19 began to impact on both FTFC programme activities and on council services. The Covid-19 pandemic is continue to impact performance in certain areas and is highlighted throughout this report.

## **COVID-19**

- 3.11 Given the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council's Directors have provided an overview of current performance. The effects of the pandemic have required the Council to adapt services to provide support for residents and to manage the impacts of the pandemic, for example to scale up the Stevenage Helps and the Local Outbreak teams, including creating a local track and trace team during the most recent lockdown period, support vaccination efforts and maintain critical service delivery. Council teams have reprioritised workloads to address particular challenges, for example, to deliver £22.5 Million of business grants and £32 Million of business rate reliefs and a range of grants, and working with commercial tenants using a Covid-19 policy to help them pay their rents.
- 3.12 The pandemic has had significant impacts on 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. In addition, as with similar organisations, the Senior Leadership Team expect there to be continuing high demand for particular services such as homelessness, non-essential repairs and void works to properties, action plans to address the increase in demand are being enhanced.
- 3.13 SBC teams are focussed and engaged on delivery of the agreed priorities, from creating new social and affordable housing, to driving forward the regeneration of the town centre, cooperative neighbourhoods and wealth building.

## **Future Town, Future Council Programme progress update**

- 3.14 The focus and scope of the FTFC programmes for 2021/22 is outlined in Appendix Two. Delivery of the agreed outcomes is monitored to ensure that the Programme remains on track.
- 3.15 Programme delivery updates for the FTFC Programmes together with an outline of any focused activity being implemented to keep the programmes on track are set out in the following paragraphs.

## **Future Town, Future Council Programmes**

### **Transforming Our Town Programme**

#### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.16 Ongoing discussions have taken place between Mace and the Council regarding demolition arrangements to progress the SG1 programme. A planned start date for these is being considered.

- 3.17 Since an accelerated delivery report was presented to the Executive in Quarter 4 2020/21, work has begun to mobilise both internal and external resources for the next stage of the Hub's development. Progress has included a workshop for the voluntary community sector to ascertain aspirations of future ways of working within the Hub.
- 3.18 Works have continued on site for the bus interchange both externally and internally including the completion of the steel frame canopy, public realm works and work to the internal walls and core.
- 3.19 Plans for the multi-storey car park (MSCP) are now in further development following the Executive approval to part fund the project using Growth Development 3 (GD3) funds. A supplier has been appointed for the design and build and initial scoping meetings have been carried out.
- 3.20 A two month return was submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), which included the proposed financial profiling of the £37.5Mmillion Stevenage Town Investment Plan award, plus a draft monitoring and evaluation plan. The final plan is due for submission when all the business cases have been completed.
- 3.21 A £16Million funding bid was made to the Government's Levelling Up Fund. It is anticipated a response will be received in Quarter 3 2021/22.

### **More Social and Affordable Housing Programme**

#### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.22 All the units at Ditchmore Lane Scheme have now been sold at a higher value than originally forecast. The scheme is currently in the defects period which will end in October 2021.
- 3.23 Internal works continued at the North Road (21 Homes) scheme including the electrical and plumbing work. Work on the show home is being accelerated with the anticipation that the home will be made available in Quarter two. Four properties had been reserved by the end of June 2021.
- 3.24 The Addison House scheme has now been handed over and lettings have been completed for the nine new one and two bed affordable homes. The scheme contains a number of environmental enhancements including triple glazing and waste water heat recovery systems. A further three bedroom house in close proximity to the new development has also been secured from the open market and renovated to provide much needed family sized council housing.
- 3.25 Work has continued at the Symonds Green (29 Homes) housing development scheme. External brick and block work has progressed and internal work continues at pace. Supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic and the shortage in materials has meant the works have been re-programmed with the

contractor, however this is not anticipated to affect the completion date for the scheme.

- 3.26 Foundation work has completed on blocks A1 and A2 of the Kenilworth Close site and work continues on the properties accessible from Stirling Close. Roof work is being carried out on the Malvern Close properties, which are on track for delivery by the end of 2021. Currently five of the seven homes at Malvern Close have been reserved, at a total value of £3.2Million, which supports the costs of the overall scheme.
- 3.27 Officers continued to work on future redevelopment plans for the scheme at The Oval. Initial discussions were held with UK Power Network (UKPN) over the existing substation on at the site and with the Highways department at Hertfordshire County Council regarding potential alternative access arrangements to the site. The architect is continuing to work on the regeneration document which will also form the basis of initial discussions with local businesses and community groups.
- 3.28 Consultation events on the scheme at Dunn Close were held for local residents. Alongside this, an online consultation has been ongoing with over 1000 responses being received so far.
- 3.29 Progress is being made to establish the Wholly Owned Company (WOC). Proposals for the new governance and required Service Level Agreements (SLA's) have been drafted. The Shared Legal Team has been appointed as the company secretary for the WOC. Two potential schemes have been identified and viability work is currently being carried out in collaboration with Finance colleagues to ensure that the schemes meet the necessary criteria that will enable funds to be drawn down from the loans.

## **Co-operative and Neighbourhoods Programme**

### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.30 Work on the Co-operative Neighbourhoods working model has continued to progress this quarter. Meetings between Neighbourhood Teams as well as between Officers and Members are underway in all Neighbourhoods. These meetings are occurring regularly and as the lockdown restrictions ease these have, where practical, been delivered face to face.
- 3.31 The development of community plans has continued this quarter. Ongoing Ward walkabouts and pop-up engagement events are helping to inform. Feedback collated from these events and through the town wide residents survey will ensure all stakeholders are directly involved in the six community plans.
- 3.32 Noticeboards have been erected across Stevenage and are being used to display notices for resident who do not have easy or regular access to the internet. Neighbourhood Wardens are continuing to update the noticeboards and are engaging with the community in response to issues that are raised.

- 3.33 There are five legacy projects from monies committed through New Homes Bonus funding due to be completed this year. Three have been completed this quarter including artwork to underpasses in St Nicholas and Martins Wood and environmental installations at the ABC Park.
- 3.34 An independent chair was appointed for the Council's Equalities Commission, and initial planning for the first meeting was developed. Governance for the commission is in place and a programme of activities and engagement is in development.
- 3.35 The second phase of the flat block refurbishment programme has reached practical completion. The pandemic continues to affect material and labour supply to the programme, but this is being monitored closely by the Council's contractors.

## **Making Your Money Count Programme**

### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.36 An initial review of 2021/22 savings achievability has been undertaken by the Assistant Director (Finance and Estates). The timing of implementation of some savings have been re-profiled which has caused an in year pressures reflected in the financial projections incorporated in the General Medium Term Financial Strategy Report, which is being considered alongside this report at the September Executive.
- 3.37 The Locality Review identified land disposal sites approved by Members in 2020/21. The capital receipts generated will be utilised in lieu. Revenue contribution to capital (RCCO) which means no revenue resources will be needed to fund capital up to and including 2026/27. This is of course subject to sale receipts being realised and the values being in line with expectations.
- 3.38 A managed contract to raise income from sponsorship started in quarter one. This Corporate Advertising and Sponsorship Framework has also been agreed and should start to generate income for the Council.
- 3.39 Successful recruitment was made to the Commercial officer posts for both trade waste and corporate activities. These appointments will assist with driving the Council's commercial agenda forwards.
- 3.40 The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are working with the Council's transformation partner to identify opportunities to improve customer service delivery and enhance the customer experience, whilst also improving the council's financial position. It is anticipated that this will be achieved by:
- Modernising the service offer with digital options
  - Cutting out waste by shortening processes
  - Implementing a customer-focused culture to prevent demand failure

## **A Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town Programme**

### **Programme Delivery Updates**

#### **Clean and Green**

- 3.41 A review of the bulky waste service was undertaken and the findings were presented to the Commercial and Investment Executive Working Group. A pilot was approved as part of the 2020/21 Quarter 4 monitoring report. The current pilot will continue until next year; at which point it will be reviewed to help determine the future charging arrangements which will be reflected in the fees and charges scheme for 2022/23.
- 3.42 Improvements were made to recycling banks at three pilot sites across the town. This included new bins and clear signage to help avoid cross contamination. These sites will be monitored and if successful could be rolled out to further areas within the town, however this will be dependent on funding being available.
- 3.43 Two Council run events for the Great British Spring Clean were successfully delivered in Shephalbury Park and Chells Park. Although both events were promoted via social media, officers were mindful of national restrictions in how many people were able to participate, so promotion was purposefully limited.
- 3.44 Work is progressing to establish new meadowland within six locations across the town as previously agreed by Council and contributing to budget savings for the General Fund in 2021/22.

#### **Healthy Stevenage**

- 3.45 The Stevenage Diabetes Prevention Project, which is funded by the Council through the Stevenage Together Partnership, was re-launched following the easing of the national COVID-19 restrictions. The project aims to help educate and prevent the development of type two diabetes in its participants, through free health tests, nutrition advice and use of the facilities at the Stevenage Leisure Limited facilities: the Arts and Leisure Centre, Swimming Centre and Golf Centre.
- 3.46 The Young People's Healthy Hub, with support from partners, hosted a basketball roadshow offering free basketball sessions to young people in parks across Stevenage during the half term period. The sessions had very positive feedback, with some sessions attracting up to 50 young people.

#### **Community Safety**

- 3.47 A special meeting of the Community Safety Responsible Authority Group (RAG) was held to focus on community safety for women and girls. The extraordinary RAG was attended from partners who support women in Stevenage. Following the meeting a smaller group met and will be launching a "women's centre" project for six months in Stevenage. The centre will be open initially two days per week and will be managed co-operatively with



partners. Women will be able to access services and attend appointments safely.

- 3.48 The No More Youth Service pilot has commenced around the County to tackle young people becoming involved in criminal activity. Further funding has been agreed through the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to extend the project for two years.

### **Stevenage Re-Imagined**

- 3.49 Funding from the Hertfordshire Community Foundation was secured to support BAME communities most impacted by COVID-19 through racial equality training, community networking and intelligence building, and mental health support sessions. Working with key partners, webinars and mental health sessions were delivered through quarter one with high levels of attendance and participation. This has generated new partnerships with health services and decision-makers to address racial inequality. An additional £5K has also been secured, which will further enable partners to create legacy elements for the project, such as an exhibition of programme and archive content.
- 3.50 A Young Songwriter programme was completed by co-producers Practice Rooms and Stevenage Music Centre. This platforms young, local songwriters and gives them an opportunity to work with professional musicians and recording studios. Songs have been produced and are now in public release and promotion phase.

### **Community Wealth Building**

- 3.51 Training has been provided to key officers on the Social Value Portal with support from the Council's Procurement team. The portal will be used for all major contracts and will tie into the work previously undertaken by Stevenage Works.
- 3.52 A bid, titled: Community Wealth Building Together has been submitted to the MHCLG having been signed off by the Herts LEP. This bid was led by SBC officers and is seeking £700,000 in funding to support Community Wealth Building Activities throughout Hertfordshire. This includes integration with the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal and a grant scheme for micro and VCSE organisations looking at skills and job creation. The Council is currently waiting to hear whether its bid has been successful.

### **Climate Change**

- 3.53 The Climate Change Citizens' Panel has been completed and the recommendations of the Panel Report incorporated into the Climate Change Action Plan and Communications and Collaborations (C&C) Plan. Future engagement will come through the C&C Plan.
- 3.54 Stevenage signed up to Net Zero Leadership Club, having already signed up to the Race to Zero online platform as part of the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) global Race to Zero campaign and UK100

pledge. This shows the Council's commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030 and working towards Stevenage wide net zero carbon emissions by 2045.

- 3.55 Executive Members are to receive a detailed update on the Council's Climate Change Action Plan during quarter 3.

### **Sustainable Transport**

- 3.56 The emerging Stevenage Connections Area Action Plan has been prepared for extensive public consultation as the first step towards adoption. Consultation material, including video, leaflets and online surveys, has been finalised and officers undertook the first steps to gauge public opinion by setting up and manning a stall at the railway station. The formal consultation will run the course of the summer before officers assess the responses and determine how best to incorporate them into emerging policy for the area.
- 3.57 Consultation on detailed plans for a major cycling scheme on North Road has started. This follows detailed discussions between Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Highways department and Council officers to develop the scheme which has secured multi-million pounds in funding from the Department for Transport's Emergency Active Travel Fund. The scheme was identified as a priority by HCC and SBC based on its inclusion in the Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

### **Corporate Performance highlights and areas for improvement**

- 3.58 Results for the full set of current corporate performance measures across all themes (FTFC programme and the Customer, Place and Transformation and Support themes) are attached as Appendix One. The overview of these results for April 2021 to June 2021 are outlined below:

<b>Number of Measures Reported</b>	<b>Meeting or exceeding target</b>	<b>Amber Status (within a manageable tolerance)</b>	<b>Red Status (urgent improvement action required)</b>	<b>Missing Data</b>
57	43	5	8	1*

\* (Explanations in paras 3.129 to 3.132) ECHFL5: Repairs satisfaction missing)

- 3.59 A summary of areas for improvement for April 2021 to June 2021 is set out in the following paragraphs across the three key delivery themes: Customer, Place, and Transformation and Support.

## **Spotlights and Areas for Improvement**

3.60 The measures below were reported to be at red or amber status for Quarter 1.

### **Homelessness Preventions**

#### **BV213: Homelessness Preventions**

- June 2021 (original) target 90 preventions
  - June 2021 (revised) target 40 preventions
  - June 2021 actual 37 preventions (amber based on revised target)
- 3.61 The Medium Term Financial Report includes quarterly monitoring projections (Appendix B) which gives an update on homeless cost projections for 2021/22. Currently there are 207 placements in Temporary Accommodation and 75 of those cases are placed into bed and breakfast at the time of writing the report.
- 3.62 The Council's Homelessness Services are continuing to face increasing service demand and increased costs due to the following factors:
- Increasing homeless presentations to the Authority
  - The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018 which has caused cases to remain in temporary accommodation for a much more substantial period
  - Reduced prevention options,
  - Pressures placed on Local Authorities under the Everyone In directive
  - Challenges of operating services throughout the pandemic.
- 3.63 The current homelessness caseload is 646, an increase of 103 on the total for the previous quarter. This includes those who are seeking housing advice, but who may not currently be threatened with homelessness. Prior to March 2020 clients from this sector made up a significant proportion of the Housing Options Team's caseload. The complexity of the issues faced by presenting clients also remains challenging.
- 3.64 Based on projections for 2021/22 it is anticipated that the Council will face a 10% increase in emergency temporary accommodation placement numbers before the end of the 3rd quarter of this financial year.
- 3.65 The problem of placing homeless families has been exacerbated by a moratorium of evictions for arrears during 2020/21 and into 2021/22. The number of private rented sector (PRS) properties becoming vacant and available for re-letting has reduced significantly. This is in part to do with the ban on evictions which was in place for 16 months from April 2020 and in part from economic issues impacting on the ability of tenants to move on and release these units for re-let.
- 3.66 The eviction ban has also impacted on the preventions the Council has achieved from tenancy sustainment interventions in both the private rented

sector and in social tenancies. Historically officers have prevented homelessness by interventions at notice stage, at the Possession order stage and on the receipt of a bailiff's warrant none of which have been necessary with the restrictions in place.

- 3.67 Affordability issues have also impacted on individuals' ability to secure their own PRS tenancies even with the financial support for deposit and rent in advance payments which we offer.
- 3.68 Families in overcrowded situations have also been less willing to allow family members to remain in their properties for extended periods because of the difficulties and tensions of the lockdown period, reducing the preventions possible through this route. Family mediation has been less possible with the lack of face to face contact and in the earlier days of COVID-19 there was a reluctance to allow home visits to take place.
- 3.69 Due to the above factors it will not be possible to achieve the original set target of 360 preventions in 2021/22. It is therefore recommended that the homelessness prevention target for this financial year should be readjusted from 360 to a more realistic target of 160 preventions.
- 3.70 To help achieve the revised target the Council has recruited two new Housing Options Caseworkers, two Senior Housing Options Caseworkers and three Rough Sleeper Co-ordinators. A further 12 month fixed term Housing Options Caseworker appointment was agreed in July.
- 3.71 As the new staff come into post and are trained the Housing Options team hope to be able to catch up on casework and strive to increase preventions and to reduce the total number of active cases that have built up during the three national lockdown. This should also assist to ease the numbers in emergency/temporary accommodation.
- 3.72 To help meet future homelessness need the Council will continue to block book hotel accommodation until the end of this year in order to ensure access to the number of units required and at a preferential rate and the costing include these block bookings until end of December 2021.
- 3.73 The Housing Development and Housing and Investment are also working in partnership to identify future accommodation opportunities to reduce the need to use bed and breakfast to secure additional units (30) from January 2022.
- 3.74 Taking steps identified in the temporary accommodation action plan, including the provision of a pipeline of additional units coming on board over this financial year and financial year 2022/023 will also help.
- 3.75 Officers are also reviewing other Hertfordshire authorities homeless trends which are currently lower to understand the drivers in Stevenage and review SBC processes.

## **Void Loss, Voids Sheltered, Voids Sheltered Major Works & Voids General Needs Major Works**

### **VoidLoss1: Void Loss in year (£)**

- June 2021 target £82,767
- June 2021 actual £148,145 (red)

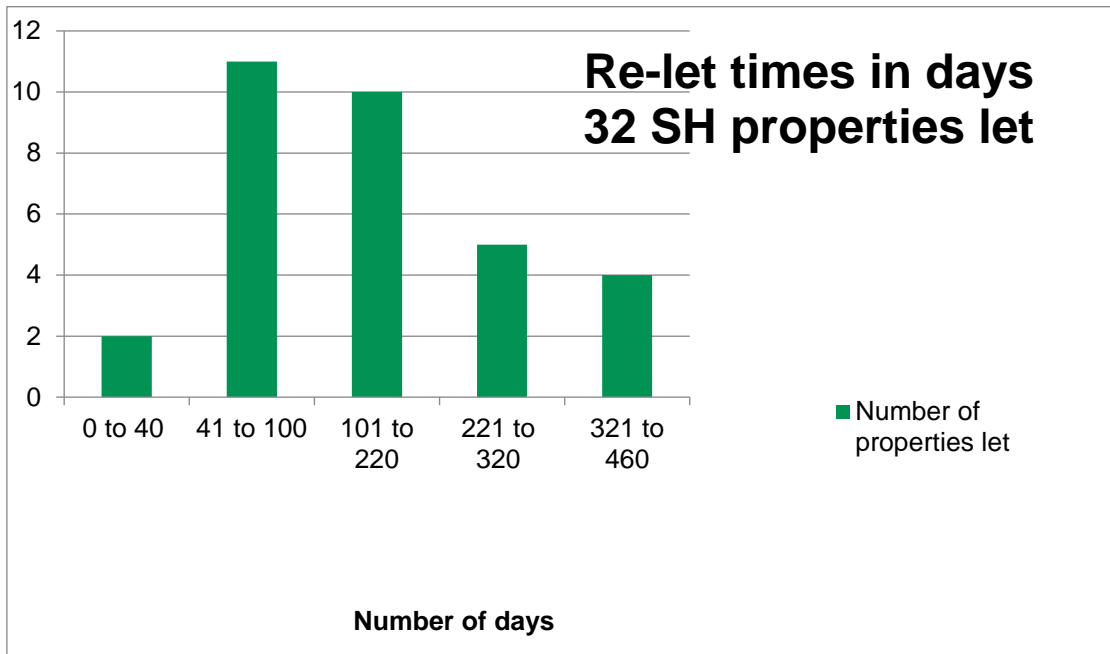
### **VoidsSheltered: The time taken to relet standard sheltered voids**

- June 2021 target 70 days
- June 2021 actual 161.5 days (red)

### **Voids ShelteredMW: The time taken to relet major works sheltered voids**

- June 2021 target 70 days
- June 2021 actual 99.67 days (red)

- 3.76 Void loss is higher than forecast for quarter one as there has been a significant increase in the number of tenants moving following the lifting of the national COVID-19 restrictions. The increase in void property numbers has an upward pressure on void losses and this is reflected in the increase to £148,145 in June. Other impacts include the delays in sourcing certain materials to complete void works, and the time taken to place certain prospective tenants into properties because of their specific support needs, as in the case of complex social issues and elderly clients.
- 3.77 Officers are taking action to reduce these impacts by streamlining the lettings process by completing lettings within six working days, and reducing the verification process to five working days. This coupled with the stabilisation of the volume of voids occurring to normal levels should enable the void loss target to be substantially improved by December 2021.
- 3.78 Void turnaround performance for General Needs properties is within target, due to the performance from 'Keys Received' (KREC) to 'Ready To let' (RTL), which when taking into account the challenges faced in the last year (restrictions on movement etc.) is positive.
- 3.79 Repairs turnaround in Independent Living properties remains under target and whilst lettings performance in this area is showing as poor, this is a positive as the historic list of void properties is being addressed robustly for the first time in many years, which will have a negative effect on the Council's Sheltered Voids Key Performance Indicators during 2021/22 whilst this is addressed.



- 3.80 The table above illustrates that 30 of the 32 Supported Housing properties let in Quarter one had been longer term voids. This has been a result
- 3.81 The Specialist Accommodation team is proactively working to let the remaining SH Standard and Major properties that have been historically void for a long time, as well as the properties that are returned continuously. This includes actively contacting new applicants to the housing register who are eligible for Independent Living and providing assistance to move where required. As the properties that have been empty for some time are let, we will inevitably see an increase in the time reported to let void sheltered properties.
- 3.82 The Specialist Accommodation team have proactively worked to let these historically empty properties and inevitably the lettings targets for sheltered housing voids will be affected.
- 3.83 The level of void activity has increased with some 26 standard sheltered units falling void during quarter one. Therefore the Voids team have faced a significant challenge in respect of maintaining the turnaround target of 70 days because of the increase.
- 3.84 A further 12 properties became void during quarter one involving a deceased tenant. Due to the increased complexity of such cases at this time it is affecting the time taken to prepare such properties and re let them. Further management activity to prepare homes in sheltered housing for those decanting from larger council owned accommodation has also increased days vacant as this takes additional time to complete.
- 3.85 Additional void times are also being incurred as part of the Flexi Care project, with some 11 voids currently held for County nominations. Officers are in discussions with HCC to review void levels through Flexi Care and will be seeking to discuss void times and rent loss compensation to mitigate this present issue. It is anticipated therefore that a positive reduction in the current 161.5 days will be achieved by the next reporting timeline.

- 3.86 Officers are currently reviewing resources allocated to the sheltered housing relet process. Steps are also being taken on how sheltered housing units are treated where they have been identified for repurposing or redevelopment to give a more accurate indication of re-let times and associated void loss.
- 3.87 The performance for Sheltered Major Works has not achieved target in part due to studio conversions being undertaken to make properties more attractive to prospective tenants through the Council's MRC Programme. These works extend void periods and impact the target. Material supply chain delays have also affected the time taken to complete works involving major works. Officers are also to review the classification of what constitutes a 'major works' property and this may also assist in returning to target day objectives.

### **Community Safety**

#### **CS8: Anti-social behaviour per 1,000 population**

- June 2021 target 8
- June 2021 actual 11 (red)

#### **CS10: Domestic Abuse per 1,000 population**

- June 2021 target 5.7
- June 2021 actual 6.07 (amber)

- 3.88 The data for these measures is provided by the Police and HCC, therefore the Community Safety team have minimal control.
- 3.89 The Police have advised that ASB levels and crime in general is back to "pre pandemic normal crime level" when compared to 2019 data. The Community Safety Team is working closely with Police colleagues and partners including councillors to target hotspot areas of ASB and nuisance.

### **Jobs Created through the Business Technology Centre**

#### **BTC1a: New jobs created through the BTC (ytd)**

- June 2021 target 15
- June 2021 actual 12 (red)

- 3.90 The jobs created through the Business Technology Centre (BTC) during Quarter one 2021/22 did not meet the target; however WENTA (the Council's managing agent) still managed to create 12 jobs during challenging economic circumstances, this is better than any quarter in 2020/21.
- 3.91 The latest quarterly return has been steady at the BTC, with some businesses outgrowing the BTC and moving on, but also downsizing or moving to work from home. The BTC has also seen start-ups and new businesses take up space at the centre through this period. It should be noted that during the pandemic the BTC has achieved its target for new business start-up this financial year.

## **Garage Voids**

### **CNM2g: Garage Voids as a Percentage of Stock**

- June 2021 target 15.6%
- June 2021 actual 16.7% (amber)

- 3.92 During Quarter one there were a number of issues which impacted on the garage void performance.
- 3.93 The detection of asbestos fibres in garages has affected the overall void rate due to a number of voids requiring specialist asbestos removal or containment measures. This is making offers on void garages in Bedwell, Broadwater, Old Town and Shephall particularly difficult at this time. The garage income projections for 2021/22 are in the September 2021 General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy Executive Report, as a result of rental income being impacted by asbestos, in approximately 442 or 6.5% of the stock.
- 3.94 Before each garage in these areas can be offered out to tenants, an asbestos report must be obtained and necessary works undertaken. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the external contractor providing the reports is experiencing difficulties in returning the reports within the agreed turnaround time, which has therefore delayed the turnaround time on void garages. The contract continues to be closely monitored and measures have been put in place to help increase the report turnaround times.
- 3.95 Options are also being appraised to help identify the most cost effective measures that will enable asbestos impacted void garages to be brought back into a lettable state.
- 3.96 The focus for the next few months will be to see how much 'temporary' work can be undertaken e.g. cleaning and encapsulation to be able to safely put the garages back into use. Enquiries are now taking place with contractors to see what might be possible in terms of undertaking works.
- 3.97 The Garages Management team are actively reviewing high demand voids to match these to applicants on waiting list as well as decreasing the turnaround time on the terminations received. The team are progressing with moving to Choice Based Lettings which will enable the team to actively promote batches of available garages on a weekly basis for bidding by applicants. The team will be aiming for an excess of 30 offers per week against current levels of 20 per week. A marketing campaign will accompany this. It is anticipated that this will have a positive impact on the void rate for the future quarters.
- 3.98 Regular calls are being carried out by the team to chase applicants for a response from the offer letter. This enables the team to quickly re-offer the garage to the next applicant or act a prompt to encourage the applicant to make the appointment for collection of keys. They are still continuing to aim for a 50% acceptance rate per month with this having been achieved for May.



- 3.99 The majority of the Voluntary and Community groups who are using garages in high demand garage compounds have been offered and/or been transferred to garages elsewhere within the town with the objective that the Council can meet the needs of residents who are waiting for garages in high demand areas.

### **Complaints responded to within deadline**

#### **CTOC1: Percentage of customer complaints responded to within deadline**

- June 2021 target 95%
- June 2021 actual 69.66% (red)

- 3.100 Quarter 1 performance was 69.66% which is lower than the Q1-Q4 2020/21 performance figure of 92.31%. There was however more flexibility on complaint deadlines in Q1-2 last year to account for the operational changes and redeployments needed to support COVI-19 pandemic work.
- 3.101 Housing performance Quarter one 2021/22 was 70.07%, compared to 2020/21 91.26% and 2019/20 96.53%.
- 3.102 Non Housing performance Quarter one 2021/22 was 69.38%, compared to 2020/21 93.18% and 2019/20 92.03%.
- 3.103 Late complaint closures in Quarter one have primarily come from four services: Repairs, Residents & Estates, Environmental Health and Engineering Services.
- 3.104 The total number of received complaints in Quarter one was 50% more than the same period in 20/21, and 30% more than the same period in 2019/20, (often about service delays caused or compounded by the pandemic).
- 3.105 High customer demand is also compounding officer capacity to respond to complaints within target timescales. In some cases it's been found that complaints were closed with the customer on time, but had not been closed in the system, and so have had their closure date retrospectively amended.
- 3.106 The Customer Focus team is providing monthly reports for each service area showing performance to help improve resolution timescales.
- 3.107 The Assistant Director Digital and Transformation has established a monthly working group with key service managers to identify issues and solutions. Reminders have been sent to service managers on the correct process for handling a complaint, and additional help has been offered to the services that are struggling most. It is anticipated that monthly performance will start to improve following the introduction of pre-mentioned measures.

## **CSC12: Percentage of calls abandoned in the Customer Service Centre**

- June 2021 target 15%
- June 2021 actual 35.9% (red)

- 3.108 Data points to an increase in the total demand for council services both by self-service and through Customer Services, while advisor resource has reduced. The increase in overall demand is linked to the pandemic and reflect increased real need and/or catch up on services that were suspended or reduced. Demand on the telephone is nearly the same April – August 2021/22 as 2019/20 (pre-pandemic), having reduced by just 2.5%. However, over the same period the number of customer emails has doubled, and while remaining lower than other channels social media contacts over that period have increased by 5 times. Overall demand for Customer Services has therefore increased slightly compared to the pre-pandemic position.
- 3.109 Phone call lengths are also increasing due to a range of complex factors that are creating weak performance on CSC12 despite the softened target in 2021/22. During April-August the average length of phone calls was also significantly higher than the same period in 19/20, having lengthened by a third from 5 minutes to 6m30s on average, which utilises a corresponding amount of resource. The reasons for this are complex and are being investigated to help determine further measures to be taken.
- 3.110 At the same time advisor resource has dropped. Around 20% of the advisor resource (5FTE) was removed through natural turnover in the last two quarters of 20/21 to make efficiency savings on the anticipation that more use of self-service would reduce customer demand. Staff turnover during April-August has been high with 7 staff leaving; mostly for more senior positions elsewhere in the council. Whilst this acts as an useful recruitment source of customer focussed and knowledgeable staff for the organisation, it does impact performance in Customer Services.
- 3.111 Taken together, Customer Services had roughly 30% less advisor resource to handle more demand in the first five months of 2021/22 compared to 19/20. This has been a primary driver for increasing telephone call abandonment.
- 3.112 Together, these factors are creating weak performance on CSC12 despite the softened target in 21/22. Despite these challenges, customer satisfaction with Customer Services (EAA1) remains strong, and customers are reporting we're resolving their enquiries effectively (CSC13a).
- 3.113 Based on July and August figures thus far the measure is likely to remain around 35-36%. Future performance is particularly difficult to forecast due to the way customer demand has been unexpectedly increasing, and the sensitivity of performance to staff turnover.
- 3.114 The Council faces the challenge of balancing finite resources against significant demand. For example, at the start of the current financial year the Council's Customer Services team experienced up to 45% increase in service

demand, with high volumes persisting in recent months. This means that there is an urgent imperative to consider the way customer demand and access to services is managed. Short term measures to support service delivery are currently being considered to improve experience, reduce complaints and improve performance. In addition to this, it is recognised that a sustainable approach is needed, which does not rely solely on increasing resource levels but finding more effective ways to meet customer needs.

- 3.115 The Council recognises that some customers and service types require in person support via the telephone or face to face and this support will remain crucial for many customers in the future. In order to enable resources to be prioritised for those who need it most, it is recognised that it will be essential to provide high quality information, advice and guidance which can be self-served online as well as quality online options for the majority of transactional services.
- 3.116 Over the last 16 months, the Covid-19 pandemic has required high levels of flexibility from many Council teams and services, adapting at pace to be able to meet new requirements, restrictions, guidance or particular service pressures. This included putting in place vital services, such as Stevenage Helps, to support residents and to provide a robust response for the local community. Other examples also include developing local Covid-19 support teams, from contact tracing, to marshalling and supplying teams to support the set up and operation of one of the first mass vaccination centres.
- 3.117 This flexible approach also meant redeploying colleagues into areas facing significant pressure such as homelessness (with the implementation of the Housing First approach), and putting place additional back up resource plans for vital services such as waste and recycling. This approach highlighted some of the benefits of a flexible in-house team, providing support to areas of particular challenge.
- 3.118 To respond to these challenges and opportunities, the Executive agreed in August 2021 a rolling transformation programme to be implemented. This includes a holistic review of processes, technology and teams to make sure they are set up in the best way possible in order to improve the customer experience, deliver the Council's strategic objectives and to minimise the need to reduce or cease services.
- 3.119 The transformation programme aims to transform the customer experience. In practice this will mean:
- One place to go for any council service – one front door for customers.
  - A choice of how customers access services - Online, on the phone, in person.
  - Self-serve is available on the website for the majority of services.
  - Customers can talk to someone in person if they need to, for example where the issue is complex, sensitive or the customer cannot access online services.

- Services are convenient, and can be accessed when, how and where customers want.
- Customers don't have to talk to multiple people / teams to get what they need.
- Customers are involved in how digital services are designed – through feedback, engagement, designing and testing new services.
- Customers know what to expect when they contact the Council.

3.120 Some actions have already been taken to address weaknesses including: new self-service computers are available in the CSC and recruitment is underway for “web wizards” to assist customers and new messages on the phone system to promote self-service. Performance will also benefit in future from the transformation of processes (from end-to-end) to modernise and automate them where possible. This will also enable advisors to achieve more at the first point of contact so that there's a reduced need for customers or advisors to speak to back-office colleagues; which can be time-consuming. Discovery work on process transformation is in progress.

3.121 Further actions being considered include co-location of service duty officers into the CSC to promote stronger joint working, creating a more extensive staff knowledgebase, and the potential to temporarily increase HRA resourcing in light of continuing high demand. As improved digital self-services are rolled out, email addresses are being published less on the website for transactional services. It is proposed that this approach is continued and extended to maximise automation, and email is focussed more on complex and ad hoc enquiries for which self-service isn't available.

3.122 Use of digital self-service has also risen during this period (measure Dig1), is substantially higher now than two years ago which is positive to report.

3.123 An Executive Member and Strategic Leadership Team session is to be held during September or October to further explore what steps can be taken whilst the rolling transformation programme is being planned and implemented.

### **Website Satisfaction**

**WebSat1: Customer Satisfaction with Council website (-1 negative score, 0 neutral score, +1 positive score)**

- June 2021 target 0
- June 2021 actual -0.27 (red)

3.124 Govmetrics is a benchmarking tool used across approximately 70 local authorities to measure customer satisfaction. The measure is the average rating users give (1 being a smiley face, 0 being neutral face, -1 being a negative face). So a score of above 0 means that the website received more positive than negative ratings. For example:

- 1 green and 1 amber response would total 1, so the average score we use as a performance measure would be 0.5

- 3 green, 1 amber and 1 red score a total of 2, so the measure would be 0.25.

3.125 Whilst this measure is still not achieving target, satisfaction is consistently improving. The cumulative measure makes it hard to see this. Non-cumulative performance since the new site launched: Quarter three 20/21: -0.35 Quarter four 20/21: -0.29 Quarter one 21/22: -0.27.

3.126 The most popular pages this quarter were on May bank holiday bin collection days, and the service page on bulky item collection. The least popular pages were also bin related, and due to people entering their address into the website search function expecting to find their collection day. The most customer feedback received related to the May 2021 election results. Interpreting the responses continues to prove challenging. Most feedback the Council receives is just a single like or dislike on a page without a further comment, so it's hard to draw strong conclusions. To gain a deeper insight a new website customer panel is being established to help inform the Council's understanding of the current customer experience and to shape future improvements.

### **Time to Recruit**

#### **EoCrec: Time to recruit**

- June 2021 target 45 days
- June 2021 actual 54 days (amber)

3.127 This measure is based upon the average days to recruit a vacancy based upon the date the recruitment approval form is received to the date that a contract is issued.

3.128 The average days to recruit for Quarter one is above target and this can primarily be attributed to a number of difficult to recruit posts, taking two rounds of recruitment to successfully secure the right candidate for the role.

3.129 As part of the recent review of agency recruitment a number of actions were agreed, to support the recruitment to more difficult to recruit posts such as use of the Stevenage even better branding and early identification of the need for market force supplements. These actions should support a reduction in time to recruit periods.

### **Non Domestic Rates**

#### **BV10: % of non-domestic rates due for the financial year received by the authority**

- June 2021 target 34%
- June 2021 achieved 33.57% (amber)

3.130 In comparing the profile of NDR collection to pre-COVID years is difficult as both in 2020/21 and 2021/22 the government gave COVID reliefs after the tax base had been approved by Council in February. In 2020/21 this amounted to

£21Million reduction in the amount to collect and in 2021/22 an estimated £11Million will be given.

- 3.131 Due to the complexity of the 2021/22 reliefs, the first 3 months of 100% relief for retail and hospitality tapered to 66% (from 1 July 2021) for some businesses this is capped at £105,000 per business, or £2Millionn per business where the business is in occupation of a property that was required, or would have been required, to close, based on the law and guidance applicable on 5 January 2021.
- 3.132 This has meant that due to the complexities of the reliefs given, the first three month relief had to be removed from business accounts and then reset for the 1st July .This has meant that many businesses then had their first DD planned for the 1st August (to allow the change to happen). This may skew the collection rate for the remainder of the year.

### **Missing Measures**

- 3.133 There is no data for Quarter one for the measures below.

#### **ECHFL5: % of repairs service customers satisfied**

- 3.134 The Repairs Team are unable to provide data for this measure for Quarter one. This is due to a fault with the Cloud Dialogues SMS system, which is used for satisfaction surveys. The team is now producing its own in-house system which is due to go live in October 2021. This will enable reporting from quarter three onwards.

### **Next Quarter Focus**

- 3.135 The Assistant Directors are responsible for improving the performance of measures that fall within their Business Units.
- 3.136 Following a number of assessments, and the new red and amber measures arising at June 2021, the improvement activities outlined below have been identified for ongoing monitoring by the Senior Leadership Team:
- Continuing to implement Housing Options plans to assist with Homelessness Preventions (paras 3.60 to 3.74)
  - Continuing to implement plans and improve processes for Void loss, Sheltered Voids and Sheltered Major Works Voids (paras 3.75 to 3.86)
  - Ensuring that issues with the letting of council garages are recognised and performance is monitored closely. Implement plans to improve the process of garages lettings. Implement plans to recover from asbestos issues (paras 3.91 to 3.98)
  - Continuing to work the BTC to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on job creation (paras 3.89 to 3.90)

- Continue to investigate issues with late complaint closures and implement actions to ensure complaints are dealt with in a timely manner (paras 3.99 to 3.106)
- Continue to monitor satisfaction with the new Council website after introduction of the new site and address issues based upon customer feedback, whilst utilising the new customer feedback panel (paras 3.123 to 3.125)
- Implementing improvement plans within the Customer Service Centre (para 3.107 to 3.123)

3.137 In addition, the development and implementation of the ICT strategy will continue to be monitored by the IT Shared Service Partnership Board to ensure that services are delivered that meet customer needs and are fit for the future.

3.138 The Senior Leadership Team will also continue to closely monitor the impact of Covid-19 on performance across all service areas during 2021/22. This will help to establish the level of impact and inform where activity and resources need to be allocated.

3.139 The Council's approach to performance management and monitoring allows the organisation to proactively identify issues and challenges and ensure prompt management intervention. The fluid nature of the framework enables the Senior Leadership Team to amend targets to ensure that they continue to reflect revisions to service delivery models where necessary and to support and drive forward additional improvements in services for the benefit of internal and external customers.

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

4.1 The information presented in this report is collated from the information provided to monitor delivery of the Future Town, Future Council Programme and corporate performance for the quarter. It aims to give Executive an overview of the achievements the Council has made for the year to date, with a focus on the previous quarter and identifies plans for continued improvements in some areas to ensure the Council is fit for the future.

4.2 The Senior Leadership Team and Service Managers have been consulted to determine the appropriate content and to identify the key achievements.

## **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 resulting financial implications.

## **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 The report outlines performance against key priorities that form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across key business unit themes. Where necessary, Equality Impact Assessments will be completed for improvement activity identified.

## **5.4 Risk Implications**

- 5.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). Officers responsible for developing performance improvement plans will need to consider any risk implications from the improvement activity identified.
- 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.

## **5.5 Other Corporate implications**

- 5.5.1 Improvement activity outlined may impact on the development of future policy or procedure.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Executive Report 10 July 2019: 2018/19 Annual Report & Performance Overview

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix One: Compendium of Performance Results
- Appendix Two: Future Town, Future Council Programme Scope/Focus for 2021/22