

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area All
Date 16 March 2022



CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER THREE 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 three 2021/22.
- 1.2 For Members information a presentation will be provided at the Executive meeting which will cover updates in relation to delivery against FTFC Cooperative Corporate Plan Priorities and the key themes resulting from the performance indicator information.

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 three 2021/22, together with the latest achievements, be noted.

- 2.2 That the continued impacts of Covid-19 on the Housing Options and Homelessness services and actions to recover performance are noted (para 3.75 to 3.96).
- 2.3 That performance challenges relating to housing voids are noted and actions to improve performance are endorsed (para 3.97 to 3.114).
- 2.4 That the challenges related to garages with asbestos, the letting of council garages, and the planned measures to improve performance are endorsed (para 3.115 to 3.136).
- 2.5 That the key customer service related challenges (including performance within the Customer Service Centre, Complaints and Website) are noted and the associated improvement activities are endorsed (para 3.137 to 3.180).
- 2.6 That the Executive Action Tracker at Appendix 3 be noted.

3 CONTEXT

- 3.1 Stevenage as a town, and Stevenage Borough Council, faces an unprecedented set of challenges that are continuing to impact on our financial and operational performance.
- 3.2 The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our performance in some specific areas and stretched our resources. This led to increased demand for a number of services, including homelessness support and advice, significant and ongoing demand for property repairs, high levels of demand related to advice for Council Tax and Housing Benefits, income and rents, and the capacity of Environmental Health team who played a leading role in Local Outbreak Management. Council teams reprioritised workloads to address particular challenges, for example, to deliver £22.5Million of business grants and £32Million 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.
- 3.3 The number of people who have seen their income impacted by the pandemic continues to rise, with the full implications of furlough ending, the universal credit uplift of £20 per week being removed, increased energy and fuel bills and wider inflation pressures yet to become clear. The upcoming increases in National Insurance is also likely to impact on household budgets.
- 3.4 The number of people facing eviction or at risk of becoming homeless is increasing. People's health, including their mental health, has come under unprecedented scrutiny, with many seeking additional support or re-evaluating their housing circumstances, employment, work life balance and other priorities.
- 3.5 As the remaining COVID-19 restrictions are gradually lifted, there are continuing efforts to encourage vaccinations (including boosters), to maintain critical service delivery and to respond to changing national trends also provide further challenges.

- 3.6 The crisis in Ukraine resulting from the invasion by Russia in February 2022 is likely to have wide reaching implications for countries across the world including the United Kingdom. Further increases in fuel, energy, utility and food prices, potential interruptions to supply chains including materials and labour, increased cyber security threats, local community relations and support for refugees could all affect the Council, local residents and local businesses. The Council is already closely monitoring the situation, and will work with local partners to identify and strive to mitigate potential and actual impacts as they arise.
- 3.7 Council teams continue to be focussed and engaged on delivery of the agreed priorities, from creating new social and affordable housing, to driving forward the transformation of the town centre and embedding the cooperative neighbourhoods approach.
- 3.8 Some local authorities have been unable to maintain all their services and have taken difficult decisions about what to continue, suspend or stop providing altogether. This includes some registered social landlords moving to emergency only repairs, and waste collections becoming less frequent.
- 3.9 That Stevenage Borough Council has been able to continue providing all its current services, as well as introducing new ones (such as Test and Trace and covid marshalls), at the same time as progressing priorities in the Future Town Future Council programme, is testament to the hard work of Members and officers.
- 3.10 However, despite best efforts it has not been possible to maintain all services at the same level as they were previously. Performance has been affected in some areas especially where demand has increased to beyond pre-pandemic levels including Repairs and Voids and the Customer Service Centre.
- 3.11 Accordingly the report that follows outlines where performance has been affected as a result of the cumulative impact of these multiple challenges, which officers anticipate will continue to be the case throughout Quarter 4 and potentially into the next financial year. However, the report also demonstrates the continuing commitment of the Council to implementing clear action plans to address and improve performance where necessary.
- 3.12 The Council is focussing on areas of challenging performance, and considering how to address them whilst continuing to provide services and support residents. The sections that follow set out the impact of the challenges the Council faces, but also the proposed actions that are being implemented to address them. Whilst it will take time for the impact of these mitigations to materialise, there are already positive signs against some of the measures. The ongoing scrutiny of Members and officers should ensure that meaningful and sustained progress is achieved over the coming months.

FUTURE TOWN FUTURE COUNCIL PROGRAMME

- 3.13 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

- 3.14 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. This is planned to be refreshed by Summer 2023.
- 3.15 At its meeting on 14 July 2021, the Executive agreed the deliverables for each of the five FTFC programmes. The town and Council's COVID recovery plans, were agreed in July 2020, with key actions now largely embedded within the updated FTFC programme.
- 3.16 'The Council published its Annual Report for 2020/2021, in July 2021. A copy is available online: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/about-the-council/annual-report/annual-report-202021.pdf>

Customer, Place and Transformation and Support

- 3.17 In addition to tracking progress against the delivery of the FTFC Programme, performance across all Council services is monitored throughout the year to highlight achievements and identify areas for improvement.
- 3.18 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 3.69).
- 3.19 Towards the end of Quarter 4 2019/20, COVID-19 began to impact on both FTFC programme activities and on council services. The impacts of the Covid-

19 pandemic are still being felt in some service areas as highlighted within this report.

Future Town, Future Council Programme progress update

- 3.20 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.
- 3.21 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 Delivery Update

- 3.22 The Transforming Our Town programme has progressed at pace during 2021/22, including the work to complete 9 detailed Business Cases to access £37.5m Towns Deal funding whilst continuing to deliver a range of projects onsite. Earlier in 2021/22, the Town Square refurbishment was completed and launched, alongside the new Co Space co-working facility at 25 Town Square. Progress has also been made with regards to getting the SG1 scheme on site. As part of this, the demolition of site Plot K (Former Police Station and Towers Garages) has commenced, with the former already handed back to the Council. Letters and FAQs have been distributed to residents and businesses close to Plot A (Swingate House) to advise them of the demolition programme for that site.
- 3.23 Works have continued for the new bus interchange, with positive progress made and including investment in the pavements and public realm that link the bus interchange with the Town Square. Work to procure a supplier for the operational management of the site is in progress. The main site is due for completion in Quarter 4.
- 3.24 A report for the Station Gateway Town Deal Business Case including the multi-storey car park (MSCP) was approved by the Executive in December 2021. At a Special Executive meeting in February 2022 the remainder of the funding for the MSCP part of the project was approved.
- 3.25 Sectional completion of retail and residential units at the Queensway scheme occurred during Quarter 3. To date, 42% of the residential units have been let and the overall site was completed in February 2022.
- 3.26 A report was presented and approved by Full Council in October 2021 to give delegated authority to the Executive to approve the business cases for projects which make up the Stevenage Town Investment Plan and Business Cases have been developed to report to relevant decision making bodies ahead of 9th March. Through the Stevenage Town Investment Plan, the town will benefit from investment in new facilities including a new leisure and sport

hub in the town centre, a new Heritage Centre, SICTEC (Single Cell Technologies) facility, walking and cycling improvements, Garden Square / public realm and enhanced facilities for local people.

More Social and Affordable Housing Programme Delivery Update

- 3.27 Work continues both internally and externally at the North Road (21 Homes) scheme. As at the end of quarter 3 there were 14 reservations on site realising £4.3m in potential sales. Handover of the scheme is anticipated in Quarter 4.
- 3.28 Work has progressed at the Symonds Green (29 Homes) site, with brick and blockwork continuing. Framing of internal rooms has completed, and plaster boarding has commenced on the lower floors.
- 3.29 The neighbourhood centre development scheme at Kenilworth Close is well underway. Brick and block work has commenced on the ground floor for block A1 of the Kenilworth Close site. Work continues on the properties accessible from Stirling Close, with marketing of these properties expected to occur in Quarter 4. The properties at Malvern Close have completed and handover to the purchasers has taken place. The sales receipts from these properties will help to support the town's regeneration aims.
- 3.30 The Dunn Close Housing First scheme received planning permission at Planning Committee in December 2021. A start on site at the scheme will begin once the necessary planning conditions have been met. The current expectation is that the scheme will be built out over an 18 month build period.
- 3.31 The open market acquisitions (OMA) scheme within the Wholly Owned Company (WOC) is progressing; three purchases were completed in early 2022.

Co-operative and Neighbourhoods Programme Delivery Update

- 3.32 Work to embed the Co-operative Neighbourhoods programme has continued to this quarter. Through a series of pop-up events, over 400 conversations with residents took place. Analysis of this data is being undertaken and will be considered in conjunction with the findings of the residents and tenants surveys.
- 3.33 Once the full analysis has been completed, the Co-operative Neighbourhood Groups will then be able to use the results to help inform future community priorities and projects that will be captured within their respective Neighbourhood Community Plans.
- 3.34 The further £100,000 Health Protection Board (HPB) funding has been allocated to all organisations that applied. The funding is designed to help local Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations mitigate the ongoing costs of the pandemic, now that central government support has started to be drawn back, and support them to resume operations. The completion of this work will free up significant capacity in the Community Development team to help support the delivery of the Community Renewal

Fund delegated grant scheme, which seeks to support and embed the community wealth building programme.

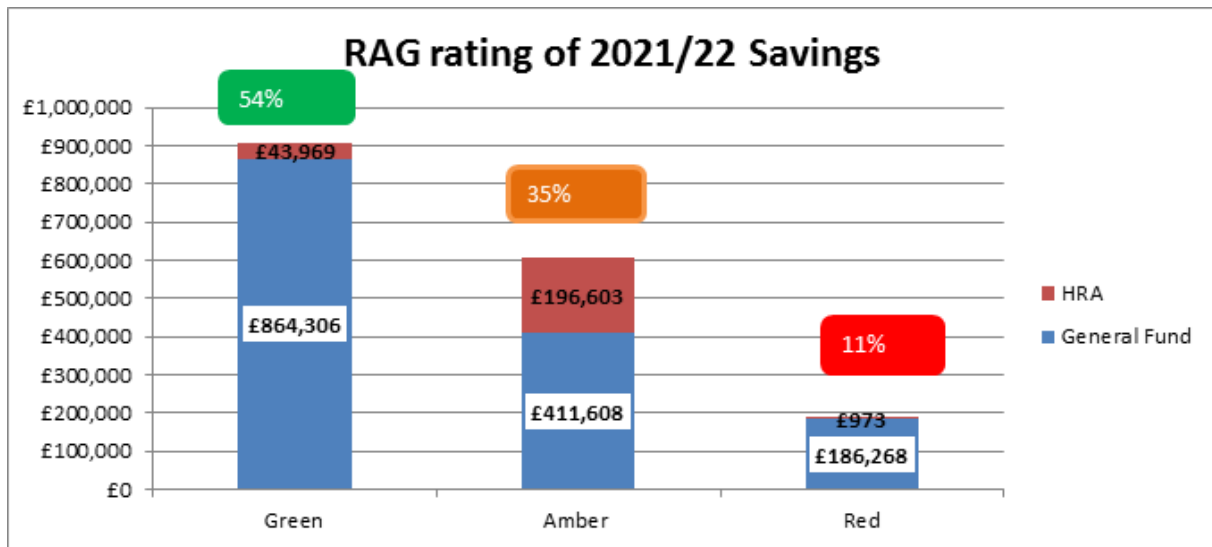
- 3.35 The Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) held another thematic meeting this quarter, focussing on criminal justice. The meeting was well attended with representation from police, courts and probation. The Commission are in the process of co-producing a Diversity Community Showcase for Stevenage and North Herts. The event will consist of a community organisation marketplace, an entertainment area and a programme of lectures & workshops. This will be in partnership with North Herts Community and Voluntary Sector, North Herts Diversity & Culture Group & North Herts African & Caribbean Community.
- 3.36 Phase three and four of the flatblock refurbishment programme has continued to progress. Delivery will continue into Quarter 4, alongside customer engagement activities and events. The pandemic continues to affect material and labour supply to the programme, but this is being monitored closely by the contractors and by the council's Housing Investment team.
- 3.37 Through the Garage Improvement Programme (GIP) 9 sites with 77 garages were handed back from the contractor this quarter. An additional site at Vinters Avenue was demolished and a lease agreed with UK Power Network to use the space to build a modern new substation. A further ten sites with 140 garages (66 of which are void) have also been approved to proceed for refurbishment or rebuilding, with a combined order value of £730k. The GIP team are now working on securing agreement and payment from the owners of freehold garages on these sites to enable the work to proceed.

Making Your Money Count Programme Delivery Update

- 3.38 At the December 2021, Executive Members approved a package of savings to meet the making Your Money Count Target (MYMC) totalling £792,945 for the General Fund versus a target of £760,000. In the January Draft Budget report this reduced to £780,945, but remained above the original target set for the General Fund. Additional budget pressures reported in the January and subsequent February 2022 General Fund budget report has meant an increase in the MYMC target for future years to a total of £2.14Million with a target of £810K for 2023/24. The options have been reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and are due to be presented to the February Executive and Council.
- 3.39 In the January and February 2022 Executive reports the CFO recommends that savings are identified early and reported in a June 2022 budget report to ensure the financial resilience of the General Fund. Other measures taken have been to ring fence business rate gains relating to 2021/22 and 2022/23 totally £1Million to an allocated reserve until they are realised. Once realised, the first call will be on financial stability and thereafter for Regeneration and Co-operative Neighbourhoods.
- 3.40 The Housing Revenue Account MYMC target was not reached and there was significant growth approved at Council in the January 2022 HRA rent setting

and budget report, this will be reviewed as part of the refresh of the HRA Business Plan in the Summer of 2022.

- 3.41 Progress in relation to the 2021/22 savings is shown below. The amber savings relate to options where the saving has been implemented but until the actual position is known for the year it will not be certain that the saving has been made i.e. saving on printing, increase in trade waste and garage income. The majority of the red rated MYMC options relate to the projected savings on the Leisure contract for 2021/22 being £108K lower than approved due in part to the impact of COVID and the timing of some options which will deliver a full year saving in 2022/23.



- 3.42 There are future Co-operative and Commercial options that will contribute to the MYMC target for example the Filming Policy which was approved by the Executive in February 2022. This will help to promote the town and create and additional sustainable revenue stream for the Council, whilst supporting the local economy.
- 3.43 Work on the Transformation programme is continuing in line with the high level principles agreed by Executive in August 2021. A central programme team has been mobilised and discovery work has commenced focusing initially on the Customer theme.

A Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town Programme Delivery Update

Clean and Green

- 3.44 An artwork competition was held during October half-term to invite the children of Stevenage to produce a poster that, if picked as the winner, would be used on the Council's waste vehicles. The four winning pieces of artwork were chosen by the Mayor and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, and it is anticipated that a photo opportunity for the children and their artwork will be facilitated in Quarter 4 in line with Coronavirus guidelines.

- 3.45 A campaign to tackle dog fouling across Stevenage is currently in development. Officers from Environmental Services are working in collaboration with Neighbourhood Wardens to educate offenders and encourage a behavioural change towards dog fouling. Following data collection to establish a baseline, a pilot project will commence in Quarter 4.
- 3.46 Capital funding of £133k has been approved for 2022/23 to commence the programme of renovating tired shrub beds, and the detailed programme will be considered by the cooperative neighbourhood areas. A further assessment of environmental standards in the context of current resources will be undertaken, to inform priority setting for the future.

Healthy Stevenage

- 3.47 Officers are taking part in ongoing discussions with Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) regarding tennis development across Stevenage parks. As part of the £32million funding pot for improving tennis facilities in the UK, the LTA have advised that Stevenage is a priority area and are supportive of a funding improvement bid for Shephall tennis courts and potentially at King George V Playing fields.
- 3.48 Ongoing suicide prevention work has encouraged more effective partnership working with key stakeholders and commissioning of a crisis café. This is being implemented at the Healthy Hub (Adult) to support mental health and wellbeing of the town with the Head of Integrated Care commissioning the team.

Community Safety

- 3.49 Further funding has been received from the Home Office and the Police and Crime Commissioner to extend the Council's work around the County with domestic abuse perpetrators until September 2022. The project is being reviewed by the Home Office quarterly.
- 3.50 Accreditation has been sought for the No More Service through RESPECT which will allow the service to receive payments from the courts.
- 3.51 The Anti-Social Behaviour team have met with partners to scope out a hybrid version of the Anti-Social Behaviour Forum which will go live in April 2022. The revitalised forum will run quarterly and residents will be engaged.

Stevenage Re-Imagined

- 3.52 The borough's Arts & Heritage Strategy continues to deliver cultural growth for our communities. In the last quarter, events including a further webinar to support BAME communities in relation to health and racial equality, a local history reminiscence workshop and other recording sessions were held at Stevenage Museum and Junction7 Creative (J7C).
- 3.53 The heritage timeline was successfully installed on Lytton Way with an extended timeline uploaded online. The online timeline continues to be promoted through the town's 75th anniversary engagement.

Community Wealth Building

- 3.54 Following the successful county-wide bid for funding to support Community Wealth Building activities from Central Government in November, work to deliver this programme has begun at pace. A Programme Manager has been appointed to support the delivery of the programme during Quarter 4.
- 3.55 The two crucial tranches of the programme are:
- The delivery of a £500,000 delegated grant scheme to support micro-businesses and the VCSE sector. Providing investment into training and skills and supporting organisations to become more enterprising.
 - Alongside the creation of two county wide working groups on procurement and strategic planning. Looking at the opportunities to embed and develop learning, quantify the potential benefits and opportunities and work to create a joined up approach throughout Hertfordshire.

Climate Change

- 3.56 Following an annual update on the council's climate change action plan and associated activities in October 2021, Members of the Executive agreed additional measures to support the Council's climate change journey. These include:
- To develop the business case to migrate the Council's corporate and waste fleet to low or zero carbon from 2028, in the interim commit to switching fuel supplies to low or zero carbon alternatives, subject to a detailed business case.
 - Following the Executive's commitment to accelerate the SG1 Phase 2 programme, including a move to the low carbon Public Sector Hub by 2026, the Council will develop proposals and a business case to reduce energy use, reduce our physical and carbon foot print of our other Council buildings.
 - Support residents and business to reduce their carbon footprint by illustrating a comprehensive range of measures they can take, including education and publicity campaign, through a Communication and Collaboration Plan.
- 3.57 Stevenage is in the first wave of Hertfordshire's Sustainable Travel Towns Programme. An Implementation Plan is being developed with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) officers and gaining support – with a list of strategies to support an emerging Sustainable Travel Town in Stevenage.
- 3.58 A dedicated page on the Council's website has been set up in relation to Climate Change: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/climate-change>. The page is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure it contains the most up to date information on what is being done and could be done to reduce impacts on the environment.

Sustainable Transport

- 3.59 The scope is being produced for the Town Deal Pedestrian and Cycling Connectivity project. This hopes to include a variety of interventions that will support active travel and connectivity aligning with the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). This project will include a heritage trail, which will further enhance and encourage people to be active and utilise the cycleways and pedestrian routes.
- 3.60 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has been working to develop an Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategy that seeks to ensure residents and businesses across Hertfordshire can safely and reliably access EV charging infrastructure in line with Local Transport Plan policies. An initial scoping workshop was held by HCC and consultants WSP in October 2021 with officers. This sought to review best practice, mapping and demand analysis to identify gaps in provision and to identify and develop an action plan and implementation plan.
- 3.61 The Council is supporting Arriva and HCC's bid to central government for the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) decarbonise funding to electrify most of Arriva existing buses, based out of their Stevenage depot.

Biodiversity

- 3.62 Three new externally funded community orchards have been planted as part of National Tree Week in Shephalbury Park, St Nicholas Park and Raleigh Crescent Open Space. This funding will also provide support to deliver a further three sites in 2022.
- 3.63 The enhanced range of meadowlands that were implemented during 2021 have been reviewed, with some changes for 2022, to include a reduction in some parkland settings, and some increases to road verge locations.

Stevenage Old Town

- 3.64 As this report covers broad priority areas, particular themes may be reported to the Executive to provide some fuller context hence why a short update on the Old Town has been provided.
- 3.65 A dedicated website was set up to support local business with re-opening safely as Covid restrictions began to lift, as well as officers giving advice to businesses. Support was also provided to local food and beverage businesses with temporary outside seating space on the High Street and safer spaces for pedestrians. Officers are working with these businesses towards making some of the space in the south of the High Street permanent.
- 3.66 Parking in the former Waitrose car park was made free of charge for three hours to encourage footfall to the Old Town for those businesses that were able to re-open. Also the Council successfully bid for Sustainable Travel Town status from HCC, without removing the free on High St Parking HCC had requested.

- 3.67 The Council supported the first ‘Old Town Live’ festival in September 2021 as well as being involved in the organising and financing of the event. The festival received positive feedback both to Officers and on social media and discussions are taking place to
- 3.68 To date the Council has consulted with over 1,600 local people and business on what works well and what we can improve about the High Street with more engagement planned. The Council is committed to work cooperatively with the local community to set out a joint vision for the High Street.

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 3.69 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 at Appendix One. The overview of these results for April 2021 to December 2021 are outlined below:

Number of Measures Reported	Meeting or exceeding target	Amber Status (within a manageable tolerance)	Red Status (urgent improvement action required)	Missing Data
45	29	3	13	0

- 3.70 Further to this 9 baseline measures are being baselined in 2021/22 (Appendix One refers). These will be introduced into the corporate suite in 2022/23.
- 3.71 Three community safety partnership measures are also monitored through the Corporate Performance Suite. The data for these measures is provided by the Police and HCC.

Spotlights and Areas for Improvement

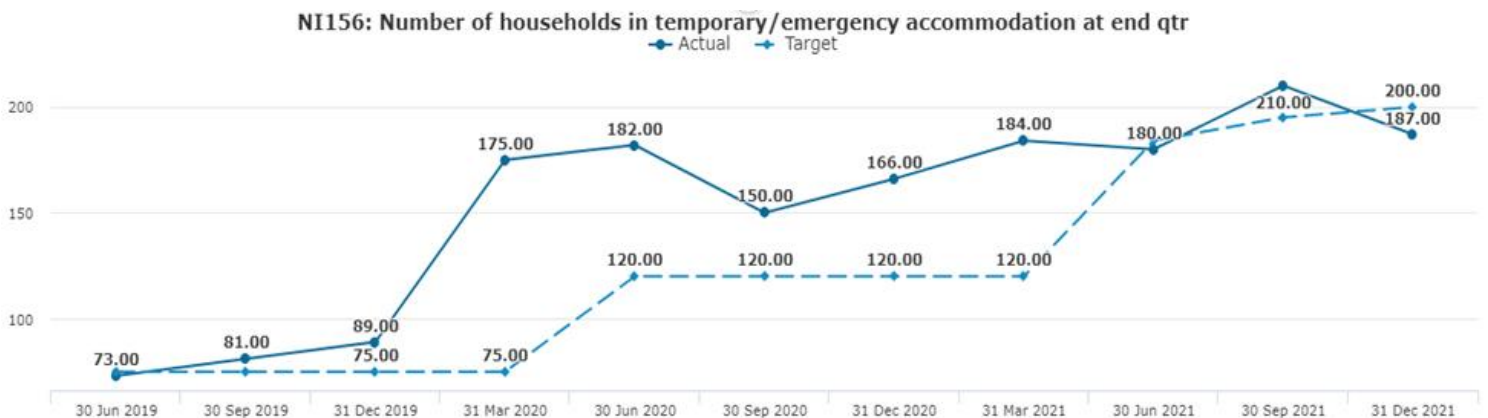
- 3.72 A summary of Council areas for improvement (April 2021 to December 2021) is set out in the following paragraphs across the three key delivery themes: Customer, Place and Transformation and Support.
- 3.73 The areas of focus below were reported to be at red or amber status for Quarter 3. They have been split into four main areas of challenge – Temporary Accommodation, Voids, Garages and Customer Services.
- 3.74 For these four main areas officer Performance Clinics have been held over the last two quarters. Each performance clinic has included attendees from all relevant service areas. These sessions have considered performance data, related issues, actions planned and in place, and future forecasting. Each service area has developed an improvement plan, the implementation of which will be monitored by the Strategic Leadership Team.

Temporary & Emergency Accommodation

NI156: Number of households in emergency/temporary accommodation at the end of the quarter

- December 2021 target 200 households
- December 2021 actual 187 households (green)

3.75 The Council has specific duties to meet the needs of those who are considered as eligible for Emergency or Temporary Accommodation. The below graph shows numbers across all Emergency/Temporary Accommodation (EA/TA) provision (including B&B) from June 2019 to the present, measured against performance target.



3.76 This chart clearly highlights that numbers in EA/TA provision soared when the 'Everyone In' directive was issued by Government during the pandemic, seeking to ensure all who are homeless or rough sleeping were supported to come off the streets (March 2020). The Council has adopted a Housing First approach to provide support to those who are homeless, and is also taking wider steps to increase the supply of homes for those who are homeless.

3.77 The following table shows Bed and Breakfast (B&B) use between April 2021 and December 2021. In July 2021, B&B units were built into the IT module and automatic reports were developed to ensure more accurate records were kept..

Total Number in B & B								
30/04/21	31/05/21	30/06/21	31/07/21	31/08/21	30/09/21	31/10/21	30/11/21	31/12/21
74	73	62	57	70	69	55	53	39

3.78 B&B use has significantly reduced since Quarter 2 2021/22, yet remained high during periods of low housing stock availability. Performance was also affected by reduced staffing in the housing team despite best efforts to secure

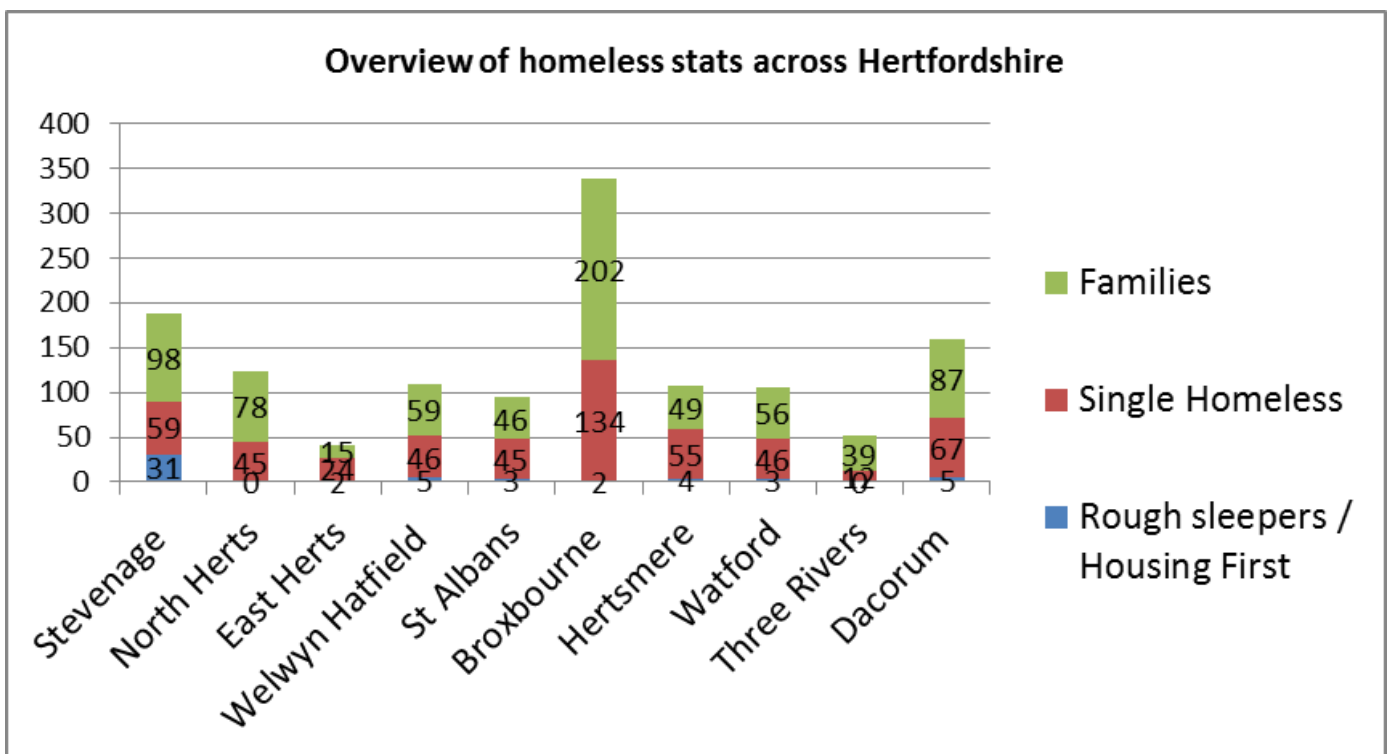
more resources. Unlike some other local authorities, the council did not end provision for its rough sleeper cohort when restrictions were lifted. Instead, the council's work has been guided by the SBC Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024, the ambition of which was to eradicate rough sleeping within the town by 2024. This strategy was implemented and the Housing First approach was initiated. This explains why numbers remain far higher than those reported June 2019 – March 2020.

Service Demand Issues

3.79 The Temporary Accommodation service is measured against numbers in B&B and numbers in SBC provision. However the Council has limited control over these indicators as they reflect demand within the community. The numbers of those who are eligible for support provision is determined by the Housing Options Service using national guidance and local policies, whilst the number of people who move on to more permanent accommodation is greatly impacted by the availability of both social housing and private rented units that enables the rehousing of clients.

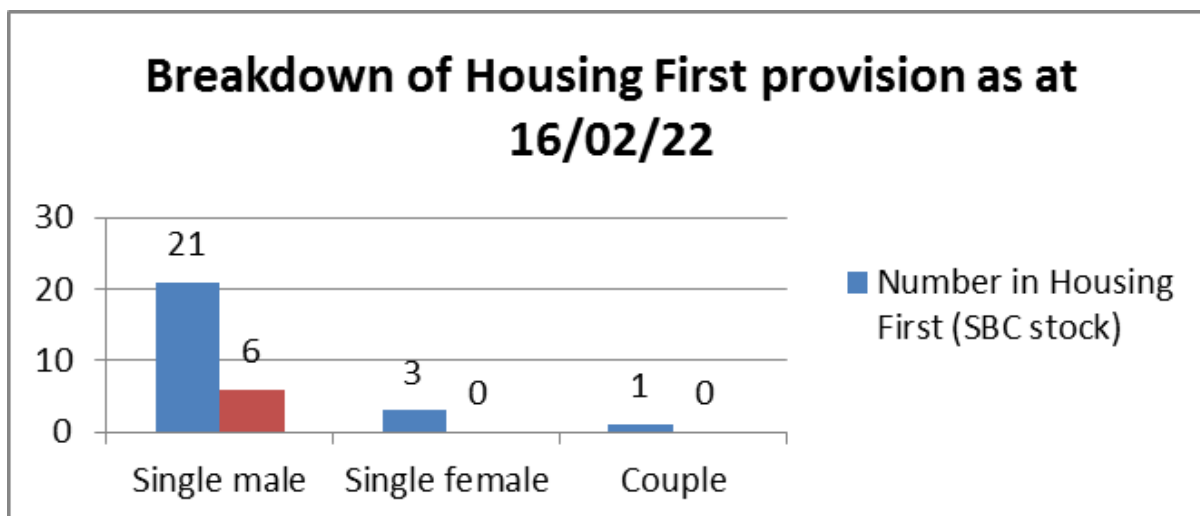
- Since April 2021 the Housing Options Service have had 1211 new case approaches
- As at 16/02/22, 464 cases remain open to the service, 158 of which are in provision under our statutory homeless duty
- An additional 31 cases are currently housed under the Housing First provision

3.80 The below chart demonstrates that Stevenage has the second highest number of homeless households in provision when compared with the other 9 local authorities across Hertfordshire. Stevenage's figures are higher than most of the other local authorities within the county despite its population being lower.



Housing First

3.81 Current status of Housing First numbers and placement is shown below:



3.82 Whilst reporting year to date includes figures for Housing First, from April 2022 the Housing First units will be reported on separately.

3.83 Further time is being spent attending multi-agency meetings to look at 'move on' pathways and ensure a multi-agency approach is taken to support this cohort with their integration into the community.

3.84 Funding streams from HCC are being negotiated and a full viability report on the Housing First Service will be prepared for the Executive in early 2022/23. This will explain in further detail, what the approach will be.

3.85 The significant increase in cases and the councils case management arrangements are being reviewed and benchmarked against other local authorities with a view to identifying potential lessons learned to inform future actions.

Improvement Actions

3.86 An IT system review is underway and the Homelessness/Housing Options service are working with the Transformation and Housing IT Systems teams to establish which system can best meet our legal reporting requirements and case and property management needs.

3.87 It has taken some time to procure and obtain planning permission to secure enough EA/TA provision to meet the demand placed on the service as a result of the pandemic. The council has further increased supply by 67 units since April 2020 (40 of which are Housing First). A further 19 units are expected for Housing First use over quarter 4 and during early 2022/23.

3.88 The TA Team continue to work closely with Housing Development and Investment to identify general needs conversions and open market acquisitions, with more due to be brought into service in the coming months.

The aim is to continue to reduce B&B use whilst work is undertaken to develop a purpose built hostel in Dunn Close. The site has now received full planning and, once operational, should facilitate the return of some current provision back to general needs stock, for allocation through the housing needs register.

- 3.89 The TA Team are in regular liaison with Lettings and Voids teams to obtain updates on void properties and ready to let dates. Officers continue to let all available units as soon as is possible and performance in this regard is being tracked through the quarterly void EA/TA indicators.
- 3.90 Officers have identified the need to review quotas of direct lets as part of the allocations policy review to ensure we are making the most effective use of our stock and helping those most in need. There is also a need to review the process for awarding homeless prevention priority to ensure effective use of officer time.
- 3.91 The Housing Options Team are continuing to reduce the number of households requiring interim accommodation and are making good use of grant funding to assist households in the private rented sector.
- 3.92 The Providing Homes Service will continue to apply for any available government funding, to assist various groups such as ex-offenders and rough sleepers. To achieve this we will review our resources and benchmark our services against other local authorities.
- 3.93 A further TA Assistant post was recruited to in November 21 to focus on general DIY jobs, in order to reduce the amount of properties sent to voids, in turn increasing the available supply of Temporary Accommodation. Consideration is also being given to the number of fixed term posts required to provide the council's statutory housing advice and homelessness responsibilities in response to the continuing high levels of demand. This is deemed necessary to ensure that skilled staff turnover is kept to a minimum providing a more resilient and stable service.

Forecasting

- 3.94 For the purposes of separating statutory duty cases from the Housing First project, EA/TA and Housing First placement figures will be reported separately from Q1 2022/23. Consideration should be given to the fact that Temporary Accommodation Officers remain responsible for the maintenance and turn-around of void Housing First stock.
- 3.95 Officers anticipate an increased demand for accommodation during Quarter 4, in response to the ending of temporary COVID-19 protection measures provided to tenants from March 2020 to September 2021. However, court delays in processing possession proceedings have reduced performance below the forecasted figures. Demand for accommodation, for the remainder of 2021/22 and for 2022/23, is dependent on multiple factors including:
- Courts clearing the back log and issuing final possession orders for eviction of those in PRS accommodation

- Affordability issues that may arise as a result of the increasing rents, cost of living and the energy crisis which could see a rise in fuel poverty throughout 22/23

3.96 For this reason Q1 projections will be kept at those set for Q4.

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

VoidLoss1: Void Loss in year (£)

- December 2021 target £239,856
- December 2021 actual £419,701.87 (red)

VoidsSheltered: The time taken to relet standard sheltered voids

- December 2021 target 70 days
- December 2021 actual 177.63 days (red)

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

- December 2021 target 70 days
- December 2021 actual 126.33 days (red)

Voids GN: The time taken to relet general needs voids

- December 2021 target 32 days
- December 2021 actual 35.52 days (red)

Voids GNMW: The time taken to relet major works general needs voids

- December 2021 target 65 days
- December 2021 actual 27.38 days (green)

3.97 The number of voids is almost 3 times higher for the year than was expected (1.55%) due a number of people choosing not to move during the pandemic. For the budget the council anticipated a projected and overall void rate of 0.49% across different types of stock. This included sheltered and temporary accommodation, which tends to have a higher void rate; while general needs void rate tends to be lower.

3.98 The table below shows the number of voids coming in each month through to December 2021. The numbers of voids reported are significantly higher than the target.

Total Voids	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
GN Standard Target	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12
GN Standard	14	23	27	40	50	85	30	24	21
GN Major Target	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
GN Major	10	2	5	5	6	19	16	13	7
SH Standard Target	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
SH Standard	65	56	53	54	54	26	52	29	32
SH Major Target	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
SH Major	4	2	4	5	4	2	3	5	4
Other Voids	25	27	29	27	27	5	30	40	41
Total Target	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Total	118	110	118	131	141	137	131	111	105
% of total rented stock Target	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49
% of total rented stock	1.49	1.39	1.49	1.65	1.78	1.77	1.69	1.37	1.29

3.99 The target for void loss for the year has been recalculated by officers due to the higher than expected number of voids. At Quarter 3 on a straight line projection the void loss would be £599K, which represents an overall void rate of approximately 1.46%. However, in modelling for the latter part of the year, Officers continue to anticipate improvement in void turnaround times during the back part of the year and therefore a reduced loss of £556K is forecast. This is based on a void loss of 1.35%.

3.100 Void loss and void turnaround times for domestic properties have been heavily impacted by a number of factors during this financial year, as reported in previous quarters. These include the threefold increase in the number of void properties requiring void work compared to the levels anticipated prior to the pandemic. A small decrease was recorded in Quarter 3, but remained above the longer-standing void rate. (Q2 void rate of rented stock, 1.73%, Q3 void rate of rented stock, 1.45%). Alongside this significant increase in volume, there are a number of other factors which have impacted performance:

National Material Shortages

3.101 National material shortages, with some supplies now delayed by an additional 4 to 6 weeks.

Allocation of Long-Term Void Sheltered Properties

3.102 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. Over time performance will improve as the average time to let properties reduces and the backlog of empty properties is addressed. There will be some exceptions to this where we have complex cases that need more time to support their transition to a new property.

- 3.103 The Specialist Accommodation team are proactively working to let the remaining Sheltered 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.
- 3.104 An increase in the number of tenants transferring into independent living scheme units alongside the decanting of some schemes is further increasing the total number of void properties.
- 3.105 There are additional void times being incurred as part of the HCC contract for Flexicare, as there are not enough suitable referrals coming through from Adult Care Services for the properties/service where people meet the scheme criteria.

Workforce

- 3.106 Recruitment and retention of staff which as per the material shortages issues, are national matters which are not unique to Stevenage and are impacting upon capacity levels within the Repairs and Voids Service.

Changing Needs

- 3.107 Pent up customer demand on the Voids Service post the lockdowns remains high. This relates to the lack of moves during the pandemic. Moves during the pandemic were limited and additionally the wait for a Housing Needs report has increased significantly due to occupational therapists resourcing issues.
- 3.108 There is an increasing list of residents requiring adapted properties. The greatest requirement is for 2 bedroom, level access properties.
- 3.109 The demand for larger 3, 4 and 5 bedroom properties is constant.

Complex Works

- 3.110 An increase in more complex works required when properties are void e.g. roof replacements, or substantial works required at the end of long-standing tenancies is leading to longer void turnaround times for such properties.
- 3.111 The Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC) Programme works are also extending void periods and impacting outturn figures. However, in the longer term changes made through the MRC contract such as studio conversions to make properties more attractive to prospective tenants should help reduce the number of voids. Material supply chain delays have also affected the time taken to complete major works.

Improvement Actions

3.112 The Repairs and Void and Providing Homes teams are implementing a range of actions to seek to mitigate or reduce the impacts of the factors listed in paragraphs 3.101-3.111. These include:

- Streamlining the lettings process so that lettings are completed within six working days, and reducing the verification process to five working days. The Lettings Team and Voids Team are working together to ensure that as much prior notice as possible is given when a General Needs property is ready to let. This enables the Lettings Team to prepare customers for their move sooner which should reduce or avoid delays. This improved process has resulted in lettings times being within target during Quarter 3.
- Completion of the end to end process review for void properties which ensure all parts of the voids and lettings process are working together effectively. This has already started to have a positive effect with proactive sharing of information has assisted lettings colleagues.
- More proactively work to let historically empty properties. In the short term the lettings figures and void loss for sheltered voids will be affected but over time performance will improve as the average time to let properties reduces and the backlog of empty properties is addressed.
- Reviewing the resources allocated to the sheltered housing re-let process. Steps are also being taken to provide more accurate indication of re-let times and associated void loss where sheltered housing units have been identified for repurposing or redevelopment.
- Refreshing the council's HRA Asset Management Strategy which will result in a more effective cyclical and planned maintenance approach to maintaining and repairing council homes.
- Continuing to work with partners and contractors to seek to improve material supply times.
- A third (temporary) voids project officer being recruited and using contractors to supplement the Voids team where required.
- Recruitment and retention issues are currently being looked at through the Business Unit Review which is underway
- Working closely with suppliers to seek to reduce material delays
- Redeploying housing staff to support the Lettings team.

3.113 An action plan is being finalised by relevant teams across the council, the implementation of which will be tracked on a regular basis.

3.114 Void numbers have reduced since November 2021 and this trend continued in January 2022. Based on current projections and the above actions being implemented, it is anticipated that the council will see an improvement in void turnaround times quarter by quarter. However the end of year, cumulative targets are unlikely to be achieved.

Garage Voids

CNM2g: Garage Voids as a Percentage of Stock

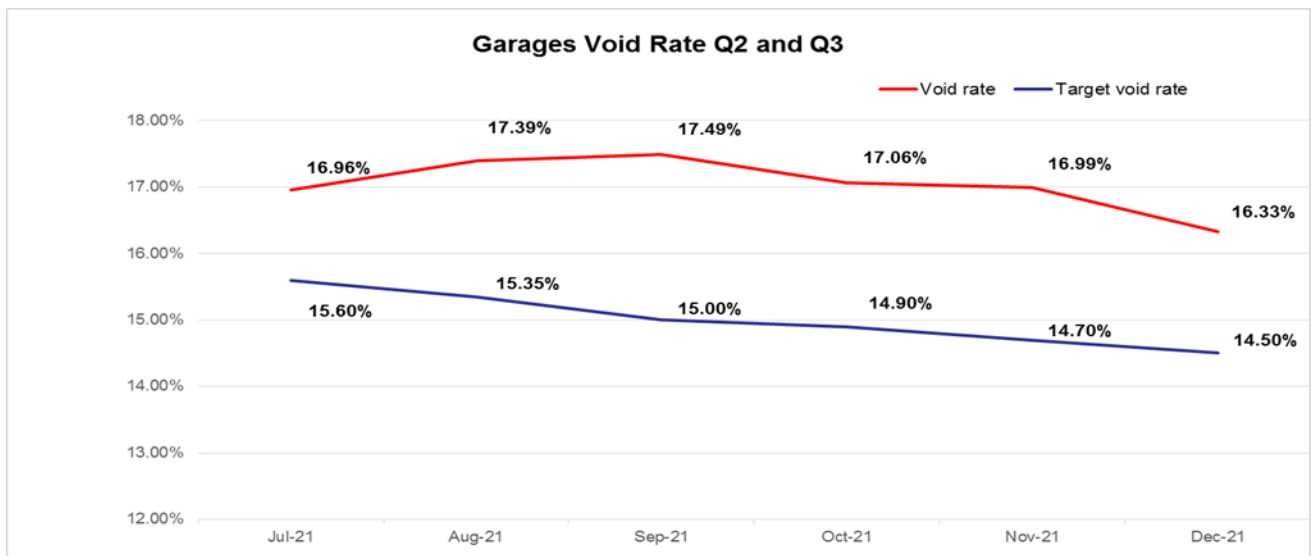
- December 2021 target 14.5%

- December 2021 actual 16.32% (red)

3.115 The targets for 2021/22 did not accurately reflect the extent of the impact of sprayed asbestos on the garage stock along with garage services capacity and an assumption that Choice Based Lettings would go live on the original date of May 2021 (now expected spring 2022).

3.116 The overall garage void rate for Quarter 3 is 16.32%, still above target (14.5%)
The void rate has reduced from 17.49% at Quarter 2, resulting in an additional £5k of rental income for the quarter.

3.117 The graph below shows performance against target this financial year.



3.118 Since Quarter 2 the entire void list has been reviewed. Voids are now categorised as 'avoidable' voids or 'unavoidable' voids which allows the garage services team to focus more on those under their control and to progress those ready for re-letting as soon as possible. At the end of Quarter 3 there were 1059 void garages of which 405 were avoidable voids and 654 unavoidable voids.

3.119 There are three key areas for focus to improve the garage void rate which are; garage repairs, asbestos issues and lettings.

Garage Repairs Issues

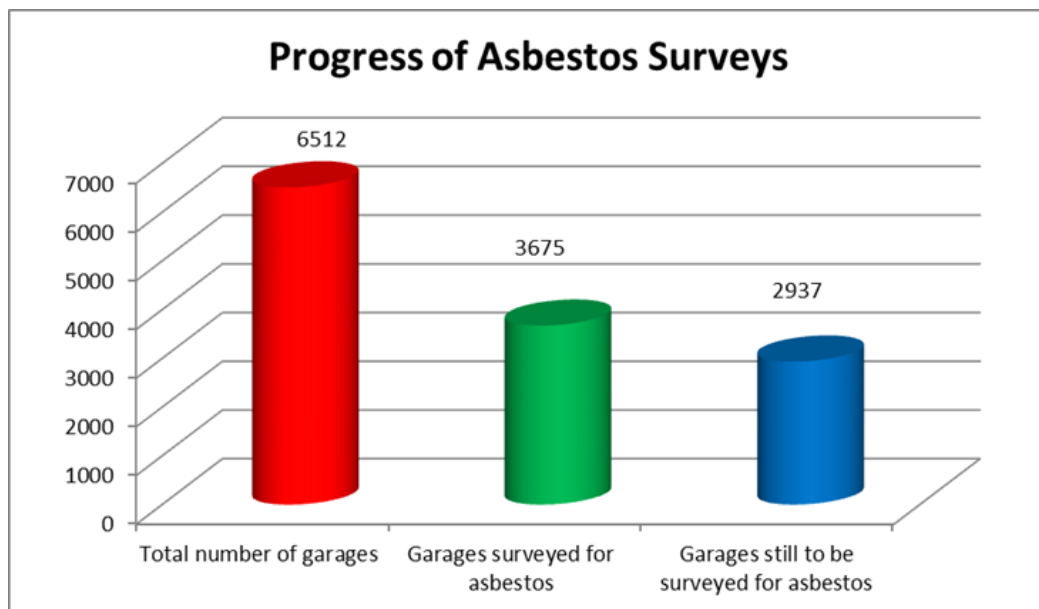
3.120 The voids identified as needing immediate repairs are being worked through with the assistance of the Estates team. 110 avoidable voids are due to be inspected by the end of Q4 to ascertain. These inspections will determine if further repairs are required.

3.121 Increasing levels of repairs has financial implications on the garage repairs budget; this pressure is being monitored and managed weekly.

3.122 Currently repairs contracts / orders are raised for each garage unit. As an interim measure the backlog work will be packaged up and let on a quotation basis. In future a Term Service Contract(s) looks favourable for the high volume repetitive type void repairs e.g. garage doors (overhauls, replacements and lock changes) roof repairs, and general building work.

Asbestos Issues

3.123 56% of garages have been surveyed for asbestos. Of the 1059 void garages in Q3, 137 (12.9%) are due to sprayed asbestos and 145 (13.7%) are due to asbestos remedial works (including temporary decants). The Q3 void loss value for asbestos issues is £45,322, broken down into £21,774 for sprayed asbestos and £23,548 for asbestos remedial works.



3.124 Arrangements with the interim asbestos surveyor continue to work well and alongside the increased volume of repairs, this has resulted in increased levels of garages being returned for letting in comparison to previous quarters.

3.125 The number of asbestos surveys in occupied garages has stalled due to no further reports of sprayed coatings being found. Garage asbestos survey data supplied by the void garage survey programme will continue to be monitored; this provides asbestos surveys for an estimated 800 voids per year.

3.126 A programme has been prepared to survey a total of 1451 garage blocks and subsequently undertake an annual re-inspection of any asbestos found. All existing garage block survey data has been inputted on to the garage asbestos register and this data will be maintained as and when new surveys are received.

3.127 Completing the asbestos register and any further asbestos surveys however will require significant financial investment and a business plan is being prepared to outline the estimated costs of this work/ resources required.

3.128 Whilst consideration is given to how best to deliver the garage survey programme, including what long-term procurement is needed, void garage surveys will continue to be prioritised through an interim contract, via mini competition.

Lettings

3.129 During November and December there were 177 offers made compared to 117 garage offers made between August and September. Acceptance rates for Quarter 3 were on average 41.71%. This compares to a 37.36% acceptance rate from the same period in 2020.

3.130 As the team have comprehensive data sets from the last 21 months, trends can be identified and steps can be taken, in advance, to mitigate the peaks and troughs in demand, terminations and acceptances. Weekly call backs continue to prove successful in chasing up garage applicants and the re-allocation of garages can be carried out the same week to ensure minimal delay.

3.131 The termination notice period will be extended from 1 to 4 weeks' notice from April 2022. This will enable pre-termination inspections, repairs and the re-allocation of garages to be carried out in the 4 week lead time and may mean that the availability of garages is advertised in advance of being able to be let. Notification of the change to the garage terms and conditions of licence has been prepared and will be included in the Rent Increase Letter to be issued in February 2022.

3.132 The development of an online presence for garage lettings is being progressed. Consultants are building the platform during January and it is due to go live in spring 2022. This will improve the customer experience and will mean that residents will be able to view available garage stock online and will be able to bid on garages of their choice. In order to address the immediate issue the option to list available garages on the council's website is also being explored.

Unavoidable Voids

3.133 The position for unavoidable voids at the end of Quarter 3 is below:

- 23 void garages that sit within disposal sites are being addressed and progressed by the Estates Team. The other 102 are being reviewed by the Housing Development team.
- 145 voids requiring asbestos remedial works are being programmed in for work.
- 137 void garages remain affected by the sprayed asbestos and are not fit for re-letting until the remedial works/future of those garages are established.
- 193 garages are being held under the Garage Improvement Programme and are earmarked for decants where required.

- The majority of Awaiting Major Works garages fall under the GIP once they are returned and will come out of AMW ready for re-letting.

Forecasting

3.134 The trajectory of the void rate for the remainder of 21/22 and for 22/23 is dependent on multiple factors, including:

- Levels of available garage stock (being returned from asbestos surveys/repairs)
- Levels of termination (historically high Feb/March)
- Capacity of the garage services team

3.135 Given the current economic forecast and the increases in cost of living, the risk of increased terminations over the coming months cannot be underestimated.

3.136 A business case detailing the levels of investment required to reduce the voids rate has been developed. It outlines the case for investment in repairs resourcing, garages services resourcing and asbestos management and the anticipated outcomes from this investment. The business case details the interdependencies between the recommendations, provides cost/benefit analysis and outlines income projections from the void stock over the next 5 years. The business case will be drawn together in Q4 and for consideration early in the Financial Year 2021/22.

Customer Services and Complaints

CSC12: Percentage of calls abandoned in the Customer Service Centre

- December 2021 target 15%
- December 2021 actual 33.8% (red)

CTOC1: Percentage of customer complaints responded to within deadline

- December 2021 target 95%
- December 2021 actual 64.31% (red)

Website Satisfaction

WebSat1: Customer Satisfaction with Council website. (This is calculated using three different options for customer to provide feedback, a red face, amber face, green face, which in turn relate to a score of -1 negative score, 0 neutral score, +1 positive score and is then drawn together into a total result)

- December 2021 target 0.1
- December 2021 actual -0.24 (red)

- 3.137 Call abandonment improved in Q3. The quarter concluded with 30% abandoned, leading to a cumulative result for the year so far of 34%.
- 3.138 The key challenges for the service include a very high turnover of staff this year and back office service backlogs in particular Housing Management and Repairs & Voids.

Staff Issues

- 3.139 Staff turnover has been over 50% in the year to date. Pre pandemic typical staff turnover was 20%.
- 3.140 Most staff have moved to more senior roles elsewhere in the organisation, such as Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) and Housing & Investment. The primary reason for this is catch up from an abnormally low movement of staff to other roles last year, in which the only staff changes were due to retirement or contract changes.
- 3.141 In addition, the council has been recruiting to large number of roles elsewhere in the organisation this year at “next step” grades for our advisors.
- 3.142 The CSC’s recruitment processes have been improved considerably in recent years, and we maintain ongoing advertising for candidates to express an interest. The team can then quickly contact this shortlist when a vacancy becomes available. However, new starters still take around 2 months of training to be effective, and 6 months to be working fully independently.

Customer Demand Issues

- 3.143 Customer demand for services has varied considerably in the past two years, and continues to change in different ways.
- 3.144 Repairs continue to be the most enquired about service, and the CSC received around 2500 contacts a month from customers in Q3. Usually in the winter higher demand is anticipated, and lower demand in the summer, due to seasonal weather changes. However, the pattern of demand for Repairs has been very unusual over the past 18 months, with the demand pattern inverted e.g. receiving only around 1500 contacts per month Jan-Feb 2021. Accordingly it is difficult to predict or plan for resourcing needs for this service at present. The changes in demand are most likely due to variations in what the service have been able to deliver operationally at different times due to restrictions, some changes in customer expectation, and some build-up of incomplete works. Routine fencing recommenced in February 2022 and the backlog of routine fencing is being carried out as a programme to ensure that historic work is cleared without impacting new work requests. This should help with the customer demand.
- 3.145 Waste and Recycling is another service with high demand from customers. During 2020 there was lower than normal contact, around 600 contacts per month, but since the end of the “third lockdown” in March 2021, the volume increased sharply and has nearly doubled to around 1100 contacts month. There is no obvious cause for this significant difference other than a change in

customer expectation or behaviour, but again it impacts upon the ability to plan and forecast. There are plans to categorise these contacts once the CSC reporting tools have been installed by IT.

3.146 In August 2021, the CSC team supported customers to pay council bills through online payments, automated telephony, and internet banking, instead of through an advisor. This planned change was to ensure we continued to meet banking rules to protect card payment details. As well as a successful and smooth change, we have also found this has approximately halved the number of phone calls about housing rent, and many of the remaining 600 contacts per month for this service are the important calls in which advisors need to help and guide tenants with debt and money issues.

3.147 These performance challenges sit alongside success in continuing to meet our EAA1 Customer Satisfaction measure and CSC13 reported resolution measures.

Improvement Actions

3.148 In September 2021, there was an informal executive meeting on customer service performance and members gave a steer on the options to be taken to address performance.

3.149 A snapshot of the actions being taken forward over the next 14 months can be here:

Q1 2022/3	Q2 2022/3	Q3 2022/3	Q4 2022/3
Opening hours Change control CSC Digital first Waste & Recycling Streetscene & Greenspace Garage Lettings	Prioritisation of phone options Digital First approach : Routine repairs	Digital tool to help find right form / service online Garage keys via locker/ post	Self-service scanning Housing options digital redesign

3.150 Actions to address performance issues fall under three key areas

- Staffing and operational issues
- Promoting self-service/ digital first
- Improving the phone options/ prioritisation

3.151 Recent improvement work has focussed on accelerating new starter training, through revised training materials and coaching training for the team leaders.

This area has been prioritised because of the high staff turnover this year and the increase in recruitment.

- 3.152 Longer term improvement work focusses on making targeted changes to move customers to digital services where possible and to focus telephone services on the people and services that need them most. Approaches to this were discussed at an Informal Executive and with relevant portfolio holders in Q3, and a plan for the next 5 quarters has been developed.
- 3.153 There will be a phased introduction of an “online first” approach for services that have good functionality. When customers phone up for these services they will be asked to hang up and go online unless the phone is their only option. This was originally planned to start in Q1 for Waste and Recycling and other environmental services as many end-to-end digital services are already in place, and delivery is now being accelerated into Q4 21/22.
- 3.154 Significant further enhancements to the online repairs reporting service are in development and scheduled for release in early Q1. Once in place a digital first approach to reporting of routine repairs will be implemented, although follow-ups and urgent/emergency work will still be dealt with over the phone.
- 3.155 A significant revision to the service choices customers are given when they phone Customer Services is planned. The team will be creating a new set of service choices for customers that will help to better prioritise advisor resource to customers wanting to contact us for SADA or being homeless on the day.
- 3.156 As well as working with IT to make changes to the phone system, the Customer Services management team are developing new training schedules to ensure we have enough of the right skillsets in place. These changes are currently planned for Q2, but will be implemented sooner if possible.
- 3.157 Another key element of the improvement will be the introduction of self-scanning for documentation. Customers are often required to supply original documents to support benefits and housing processes, and scanning and returning these occupies around 2 advisors each day. Enabling customers to scan documents for themselves should speed the process up for them and free advisors for other tasks. As technical development is required for this, it is currently planned for Q4 22/23.
- 3.158 Marketing and communications activity is increasing in order to encourage customers to utilise and take advantage of our website services.

Forecasting

- 3.159 Because customer demand patterns are unusual at the moment and because there may be more staff turnover, neither of which the CSC can fully control, our quarterly performance forecasting is particularly challenging this year.
- 3.160 That said, the general expectation is for generally more customer demand due to poor weather and annual year-end processes in March. Consequently the

CSC12 forecast for Q4 is 37% which contributes for a cumulative result forecast of 35%.

Complaints

Issues

- 3.161 Late complaint closures in Q1-Q3 have primarily related to six services: Repairs, Residents & Estates, Environmental Health, Engineering Services, Gas and Investment. However, Engineering & Environmental Health performance has greatly improved and they both achieved 100% monthly performance in November & December.
- 3.162 High customer demand is also compounding officer capacity to respond to complaints within target timescales. The total number of direct complaints handled Q1-Q3 was 14% more than the same period in 20/21, and 42% more than the same period in 2019/20.
- 3.163 The sharpest rise in volume received is for Member Enquiries. The total number of Member Enquiries (customer issues reported via members) handled Q1-Q3 was 42% more than the same period 20/21 and 36% more than the same period 2019/20.
- 3.164 The highest volume of complaints and member enquiries overall are:

	Complaints 1 st Apr 21 – 20 Jan 22	Whole year 2020/21	Overdue as at 20 Jan 22
Repairs	628	457	31
Residents and Estates	416	299	34

- 3.165 In some cases it's been found that complaints were closed with the customer on time, but had not been closed in the system hence requiring the closure date to be retrospectively amended.

Improvements

- 3.166 The Assistant Director Digital and Transformation established a 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 these measures. However, there are many cases beyond target date that will have a detrimental effect on the service level once they are closed, so we will not achieve our cumulative target this financial year.
- 3.167 A more detailed approach to understanding the underlying problems in Repairs and Residents & Estates is being developed and implemented to help support improved complaints resolution in these services. With regards to repairs, over 40% of the complaints are service requests. The fencing programme now in place should help this to improve.

3.168 The Customer Focus team is providing monthly reports for each service area showing performance to help improve resolution timescales. They are providing detailed weekly reports to the six service areas with the highest level of late and overdue complaints.

3.169 Housing have temporarily brought in additional support, three Complaints Managers on short term contracts, to help them catch up on their backlog of overdue cases and assist with a number of complex cases. The Repairs service has also recruited a dedicated officer to support complaints investigations.

Forecasting

3.170 It is difficult to forecast performance as the previously mentioned service areas have cases that are beyond target that will adversely affect service levels when they are closed. Due to the high volumes it is possible that, even with the improvement activity in place, it will be several months before the service levels start to improve.

3.171 The performance target for CTOC1 for each quarter this year is that 95% of complaints should be resolved on time. The most recent data (table below) shows that these two services are still performing significantly below this.

3.172 As well as previous reported supporting actions the following positive actions are also being undertaken for Repairs and Resident and Estate Services:

- Services agree additional time for complaint resolution with the customer if it's realistically needed to effectively investigate and resolve the complaint
- Management teams focus efforts on clearing backlogs of overdue complaints, while the dedicated complaints managers to continue focussing on in-date complaints; to make it more likely new complaints coming in are resolved on time and stop a vicious-cycle
- Root-cause analysis to understand why volumes of new complaints remain high, and take preventative actions

3.173 It is imperative that services close all the remaining overdue cases in Q4 so we can start with a clean sheet in 2022/23. If many of the overdue cases are not closed before 31 March 2022 we will not be able to achieve target in the next financial year either.

Website Satisfaction

3.174 This measure continues to be challenging to interpret due for two reasons.

3.175 Firstly, the website received 1760 satisfaction ratings in the first three quarters. This sounds a lot, but as there were 7.9million website page views, it means the feedback sample is very small, around 0.02%. Feedback tends to be skewed towards people with strong opinions and of those 1760 ratings, customers only provided written feedback 28% of the time.

3.176 Secondly, from the written feedback that is received, it's clear that comments (good, bad, or neutral) are made for a variety reasons. A recent analysis found the following:

- 40% related to the website itself
- 35% were about council services themselves or the town in general
- 10% were specifically related to parking fines
- 10% were not possible to understand
- 5% should have been looking for a different council

3.177 Consequently this measure is of really quite broad sentiment, rather than specifically views on the website.

3.178 Nevertheless this is still an important motivator for continuing to develop the council's website. Good working arrangements are in place with the Communications and Marketing team, which enabled 34 News stories to be published in Q3 – around three a week. New template styles have also started to be used to help with publishing more complex pages. For instance, some long pages like Right to Buy have been reformatted using “accordion text”, this quickly shows all the sub-headings on the page, so the reader can easily find the part of interest to them and then click to reveal the detailed information.

3.179 The Council Tax section of the website has been re-written to reduce the number of pages, and make it really simple to find the topic of interest to the customer.

3.180 Other areas that are red or amber status for Quarter 3 that are also being monitored are below:

Human Resources

Apprentices

EoC4a: Percentage of apprentices in post as a percentage of workforce

- December 2021 target 2.5%
- December 2021 actual 1.05% (red)

3.181 During this quarter a number of apprentices have gone on to secure more senior roles within the Council or have completed their qualifications.

3.182 The Learning & Development team is working with service managers to identify new apprenticeship opportunities

Sickness Absence

Pe4a: Sickness Absence Rate for the Current Workforce (FTE)

- December 2021 target 8 days
- December 2021 actual 9.17 days (red)

3.183 Whilst sickness absence levels have increased this quarter compared to previous quarters, sickness does remain below levels seen before the

Coronavirus pandemic (Quarter 3 2019/20 sickness absence was 9.56 days per FTE).

- 3.184 Data, derived from Good Shape services (our absence reporting provider), shows that across all sectors, the nationwide average absence rate in December 2021 was at 5.34% - its highest level since January 2021. The national historical 5-year average [2016-2020] for absence rates during December is 3.72%. The 5.34% from Good Shape is a national average so includes all sectors and all types of role and is therefore a good indicator that absence is high across the board. For percentage comparison purposes, in the second week of January when reporting to the COVID-19 reporting group for Hertfordshire, absence percentages went up to 6.5% with the SBC percentage tracking at 4.35%.
- 3.185 Levels of short term sickness are being impacted by those off with seasonal issues such as coughs and colds, coupled with those off with Covid-19 related sickness absence. Levels of long term sickness have increased during 2021/22, with increased levels of absence for serious health issues such as cancer treatment making up 18% of all long term absence from work. Additionally we have seen an increase in those absent from work due with issues linked to stress, anxiety and depression, this type of absence makes up 27% of all long term sickness absence.
- 3.186 Stevenage Borough Council alongside the other Hertfordshire districts have been successful in bidding for a small pot of COVID-19 recovery funding to support a programme of work designed to support mental health wellbeing and resilience in the workplace.

Finance

Savings

FS1a: Percentage GF approved savings removed from GF budget for current year

- December 2021 target 95%
- December 2021 actual 87% (amber)

FS4: Percentage of HRA savings identified to meet one year target

- December 2021 target 95%
- December 2021 actual 25.45% (red)

- 3.187 87% of General Fund savings are estimated to be delivered, some savings are green and have been delivered and some within the 87% are at amber status because the actual delivery won't be known until year end such as savings on postage and printing.
- 3.188 A number of pressures have arisen for the HRA which have been included in the 2022/23 budget pending the HRA BP review to be reported to the Executive during 2022, this will address the future savings target required and the level of growth the HRA can afford.

Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates

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

- December 2021 target 89%
- December 2021 actual 86.6% (amber)

BV9: % council tax collected

- December 2021 target 88%
- December 2021 actual 86.1% (red)

3.189 Council Tax continues to be below what was collected pre-COVID, but the taxbase is higher and negates some of the potential loss. This is borne out by the projected surplus due on the Collection Fund for 2021/22 of which £50K is applicable to Stevenage.

3.190 Business Rates continues to be impacted by COVID reliefs which skew the collection position. This is going to be further affected as a result of the announcement in December regarding the COVID Additional Relief Fund (CARF), through which Stevenage has been allocated a maximum of £2.6Million to allocate to the 2021/22 financial year based on the criteria set out by the government. This will impact on the 4th quarter results as the scheme will be going live in February 2022.

Housing Benefit Claims (Time Taken)

NI181: Time taken (days) to process housing benefit new claims and change events

- December 2021 target 10 days
- December 2021 actual 11.69 days (amber)

3.191 The Benefits Team experienced increased demand in October 2021 which saw a monthly figure of 17.09 days, however subsequent months have been below target (November 6.6 days, December 8.61 days, January 8.02 days) However due to the cumulative nature of the KPI the October result has turned the indicator amber.

Jobs Created through the Business Technology Centre

BTC1a: New jobs created through the BTC (ytd)

- December 2021 target 45
- December 2021 actual 20 (red)

3.192 Due to the nature of this measure having targets which come from a contract which is now in its 3rd year, it may well be difficult to achieve target this year because the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on the economy are not reflected in the original targets that were set.

3.193 The lockdown and the Omicron Variant has had a significant impact on the BTC and those accessing one to one advice and webinars support. However, it is on target in terms of achieving its financial performance targets.

3.194 Occupancy continues to be very strong, even with a regular churn of businesses leaving the centre and new ones taking up space

Next Quarter Focus

3.195 The Assistant Directors are responsible for improving the performance of measures that fall within their Business Units. Performance clinics have also been introduced over the last two quarters to main a strong focus on performance improvement.

3.196 Following a number of assessments, and the new red and amber measures arising at December 2021, the improvement activities outlined below have been identified for ongoing monitoring by the Senior Leadership Team:

- Continuing to implement Housing First plans and other plans within the Housing Options and Homelessness team to assist with numbers in temporary/emergency accommodation (paras 3.75 to 3.96)
- Continuing to implement plans and improve processes for Voids measures (paras 3.97 to 3.114)
- Ensuring that issues with the letting of council garages are recognised and performance is monitored closely. Implementation of plans to improve the process of garages lettings. Implementation of plans to recover from asbestos issues (paras 3.115 to 3.136)
- Implementing improvement plans within the Customer Service Centre (including Complaints and Website) (paras 3.137 to 3.180)

3.197 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. This will also be informed by the recent review of the strategy that has been undertaken.

3.198 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.

3.199 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.

APPENDICES

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