

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT – SIX MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE

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| <p>To implement the General Fund Asset Management Strategy and create a Corporate Landlord function, the following activity is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of new property data management software to manage the Council's assets • Ensure adequate resources are available to deliver the Corporate Landlord function • Continue the review of the Council's commercial portfolio • Deliver the Corporate Landlord function • Embedding the new Facilities Management system to integrate operational compliance work within a single system • Procurement of compliance services, covering Fire, Gas/Water and Electrical contracts | <p>The new Asset Management System has been uploaded with commercial properties and data checks of the information are being carried out.</p> <p>The new Asset Management System, once fully implemented, should assist with the review of the Council's commercial portfolio and delivery of the Corporate Landlord function.</p> <p>Recruitment and retention of staff within the Estates service continues to be difficult due to competition from the private sector. The job descriptions of vacant roles are being reviewed to make the roles more desirable.</p> <p>The new Computer Aided Facilities Management System is now live. The system will enhance compliance monitoring and management of the Council's buildings.</p> <p>The procurement of compliance services has not as yet been carried out.</p> |
| <p>Balancing the Budget: To ensure that the Council has sufficient resources to fund its medium and long-term service plans and corporate priorities the following activity is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the refresh of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan • Carry out a review of the Council's reserves • Development of a Capital Funding Plan to identify and progress funding sources to ensure suitable capital funding is in place to deliver the Council's priorities • Continue to find savings as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process, incorporating the work around the four transformation themes • Robustly undertake budget monitoring to ensure all costs are accurately forecasted and profiled. | <p>A review of the 30-year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan has been carried out to incorporate new government requirements, welfare and social reforms and inflationary pressures. The draft Business Plan was considered at Community Select Committee on 19th October and then at Executive in November 2023.</p> <p>A Super Capital Strategy is being developed and is scheduled to be reported to Executive in November 2023.</p> <p>The Council needs to find savings of £1.2M for 2024/25 and then £1M each year for the next three years. Star Chamber events have been held with Assistant Directors to identify savings within each Business Unit. Identified savings were considered by the Financial Security Group on 25th October 2023. A report will be going to Executive in November to consider the savings which have been identified.</p> <p>Budgets are monitored quarterly and reported to SLT and Executive. The Quarter One monitor is showing</p> |

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| | that the majority of proposed savings identified for 2023/24 are on target to be achieved. |
| <p>Commercialisation: To ensure that the Council's ambitious Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy can be achieved, a programme of work is required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the Commercial and Insourcing Strategy. • Review of Fees and Charges for 2024/25 • Continue to assess the options outlined in the Insourcing Roadmap for 2022-24 | <p>The Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023-2026 was agreed by Executive at its meeting in September. The strategy outlines the Council's approach to operating commercially. This will be achieved through maximising opportunities to insource services, the delivery of business process improvements and the generation of new or enhanced sources of revenue. The commercial culture across the organisation will continue to be developed, to ensure that staff are equipped with the right skills to deliver.</p> <p>New fees and charges for 2024/25 were agreed by Executive in September 2023.</p> <p>Options for new income streams are progressing and reports will be submitted in Q2, Q3 and Q4 with proposals.</p> |
| <p>Council Housebuilding and Acquisitions Programme: To ensure the Council can deliver new council owned homes as programmed the following action is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out viability assessments prior to lending being approved for the Wholly Owned Company to demonstrate they meet key targets as outlined in the Business Plan • Explore grant funding opportunities with Housing Associations in the local area to secure nomination rights to properties • Ongoing governance and review by the Housing Development and Regeneration Working Group • Key Performance Indicators to be determined and monitored for the Wholly Owned Company regarding key financial performance indicators | <p>The Council has received grant funding of £10.6M from Homes England as part of their Affordable Homes Programme. This will be used to build a new Independent Living Scheme.</p> <p>Regular updates continue to be provided at Housing Development and Regeneration meetings.</p> <p>Performance indicators in relation to number of affordable homes delivered by the Council and number of private homes provided is included in the quarterly performance report which is reported to Executive.</p> |
| <p>Socio-Economic Impacts: As a result of the combined socio-economic impacts of welfare reform, the Covid-19 pandemic, and an economic downturn the following action is planned:</p> | <p>Funding of £300K is being received in instalments and is being used to support local small businesses. This is part of the Mission 44 funding, and the Council is working with schools to encourage STEM learning to ensure better prospects for young people.</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop and update the online Cost of Living information hub on the Council's website, covering Council support and signposting to other support including government and local grants, advice about avoiding scams, and support with household costs such as school uniforms. • Continue to work with partners including Citizen's Advice and the Money Advice Unit to offer residents a comprehensive advice and support service • Continue to operate and promote the Warm Spaces scheme, utilising public, community, and other buildings to offer comfort during the winter months • Offer advice to help people with cooking on a budget, including links to Step to Skills to develop learning opportunities • Continue to promote availability of local employment opportunities and skills and training courses (including funding available to support access) to help raise awareness and confidence for people to increase income and improve their financial wellbeing. • Develop and implement decarbonisation schemes to reduce Council and tenant costs. To include a bid to Round 2.1 of the Government's Social Housing Decarbonation Fund targeting properties with an EPC D rating or below. • Modelling the impact of energy increases in the charges to tenants and leaseholders to consider how best to support people with managing costs. • Continue to work through the Stevenage Together partnership to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate. • Continue to work with the County and district and borough councils in Hertfordshire to share learning and best practice and to co-ordinate activity where appropriate. • Further develop the use of the Social Value Portal to divert funding from Council contractors to local skills | <p>The Social Inclusion Partnership has been set up to share information about services and applying for funding collaboratively. It is made up of voluntary sector organisations who have come together and is being supported by the Council and Citizens Advice Stevenage.</p> <p>The Welfare Reform Group continues to meet. A dashboard is being used to inform the Council's understanding of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis locally. Data is collected from colleagues and partners who attend Welfare Reform Group meetings. The dashboard is made up of 13 different measures which are analysed quarterly to inform the Council's and partners' understanding of local trends.</p> <p>The Council's website contains information to help residents to manage the cost of living and this is updated regularly with new advice and how to access grants and benefits.</p> <p>A new Collection and Engagement IT solution to allow focus on high-risk Universal Credit claim cases is being procured. The new system will automate many tasks required to reach customers in arrears and will enable early intervention and assist with proactive management of arrears cases.</p> <p>The Council has recently partnered with Sustainable X to deliver a fully funded Sustainable Support Programme for local businesses to support key learning of sustainable practices and opportunities for businesses. The programme includes skills and training support on sustainable supply chain management and wider stakeholder engagement. The programme launched on 28th September with a Sustainable Meet the Buyer event, providing unique collaboration opportunities for both Buyers and Suppliers. It also offers participants the chance to grow their network with potential supply chain connections too.</p> <p>The Council was successful in its bid for Round 2.1 of the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and will receive £2.6M. This will need to be match funded. The aim of the funding is to help the country meet its net zero targets, but will make resident's homes more energy efficient, comfortable and affordable to heat. An updated Housing Asset Management Strategy is going to be presented to the Executive in November which sets out the Council's approach to decarbonisation of its housing stock within</p> |

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| development and key local investment priorities. | the available resources identified in the revised HRA Business Plan. |
| <p>Health and Safety: Continue to enhance and embed health and safety compliance and performance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the rolling programme of internal and external audits for medium and high-risk services • Complete the implementation of health and safety enhancements for the Council's identified health and safety risks • | <p>All high health and safety risks are reviewed by the Strategic Health and Safety Group and reported to Corporate Risk Group and the Senior Leadership Team quarterly. The monitor is also reviewed by the Chief Executive at monthly HR meetings.</p> |
| <p>IT Resilience and Cyber Security: The Shared IT Service to continue to implement the IT Strategy and Action Plan to enhance IT infrastructure, cyber security, IT resilience by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Cyber Treatment Plan • Gain Cyber Assessment Framework accreditation • Agree resources and actions required to implement the SOCITM recommendations • Recruitment to key ICT roles to be able to deliver the ICT work programme • Complete the roll out of Windows 10 and M365 | <p>It is anticipated that the Cyber Treatment Plan actions will be completed by the end of December 2023.</p> <p>SOCITM carried out a review of Shared IT Services in February 2022 and following on from this SOCITM were commissioned to design the Future Operating Model for the Joint IT Service. The recommended Future Operating Model was agreed by the Joint Information Communication Technology Committee at its meeting on 2nd October 2023.</p> <p>Work has commenced to gain Cyber Assessment Framework accreditation. The Framework provides a systematic and comprehensive approach to assessing the extent to which cyber risks to essential functions are being managed. The self-assessment against the Cyber Assessment Framework has commenced.</p> <p>Recruitment to the IT Security Officer role continues to be difficult. The role has recently been advertised again.</p> <p>The roll out of Microsoft 365 (M365) is now complete, except for a few people who have not been able to migrate over to M365 as the systems they use cannot currently be used on M365. These systems should be updated by end of October 2023. The removal of the 2008 servers is nearing completion.</p> |

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| <p>Repairs and Maintenance: To reduce the backlog in repairs due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the damage caused by the recent storms the following actions is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the mobilisation of new fencing and guttering programmes and embedding of new Repairs Supervisors who are responsible for ensuring repairs are undertaken in an efficient, timely and effective way. • Launch of a new online reporting repairs service which will allow customers to select their own repair appointment times • Appointment to vacant repairs posts to increase the capacity and performance of the Repairs service | <p>A fencing programme has been put in place by the Housing Investment team which aims to clear the historic backlog during 2023/24 and 2024/25. Changes to ways of working for the Repairs Supervisors have been introduced. There is still work to do in embedding these changes and implementing any other changes that can further improve service performance (customer satisfaction, first time fix, etc).</p> <p>‘Book Hub’ the new online reporting repairs service, which will allow customers to select their own repair appointment times, has been released in-house and testing is being carried out. Once this is complete then the system will be rolled out to residents.</p> <p>There are still a number of key back-office posts which are proving difficult to fill. These include Project Officer and Project Operative in the Voids team and Maintenance Surveyors in the Contracts and Commercial team.</p> |
| <p>Corporate Capacity To ensure the Council has the capacity to carry out all of its priorities as well as provide its core services and implement new government requirements as they arise the following actions are planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of service planning in all service areas to improve resource planning • HR team to continue working with service leadership teams to prioritise recruitment and associated support plans | <p>Service Plans have now been produced for all service areas. These Service Plans set out the objectives of each service for the forthcoming year. The plan contains information about the service’s performance targets and programme milestones. It sets out the risks, staff development activities, equality, budgetary, resident engagement and workforce considerations that will inform and influence service delivery throughout the year.</p> <p>There are still some challenging areas where posts are proving hard to fill. These include vital service areas such as Building Surveyors and IT Security officers. The HR Team continue to support managers to write adverts and explore ways to encourage applicants.</p> |

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| <p>Environmental Maintenance Strategy: To ensure that best practice and statutory compliance is achieved in relation to the Environmental Maintenance service the following action is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update guidance on the process of reporting graffiti removal work to be reviewed. | <p>The process for the removal of graffiti has now been reviewed so that all reports of graffiti go to Community Safety to investigate and build stats, tag details etc. and then to the SDS Operations Team for removal of the graffiti. This audit action is now considered to be complete.</p> |
| <p>Social Housing Regulation Bill: To deliver the proposals set out in the Social Housing White Paper which will give tenants greater powers, improve access to swift and fair redress and enhance the powers of the Social Housing Regulator, the following action is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of a resident/tenant engagement proposal to enable the tenants voice to influence Council policies and decision making and develop a governance structure for this • Ensure Members and Boards are fully aware of their responsibilities for consumer standard compliance • Develop and implement a breach self-referral process • Carry out a gap analysis exercise once new consumer standards are shared • Implement the required new Tenant Satisfaction Measures which local authorities will be required to report on from April 2023. • Implement the process for capturing the 12 Tenant Perception measures which local authorities will be required to report on from March 2024. • Commence a stock condition survey. This will run for the next 5 years. • Develop and publish a new Communications Plan | <p>The Social Housing Regulation Bill received Royal Assent on 20th July 2023.</p> <p>The Regulator has advised that it is proposing to start the new programme of regulatory inspection from next April and landlords will need to demonstrate how they are providing good quality homes and services for tenants as well as meeting its governance and viability standards.</p> <p>The Regulator of Social Housing has consulted on the new consumer standards that landlords will need to meet and the Council has submitted its response to this consultation.</p> <p>The Community Development team have secured funding for an additional person to be appointed to implement building safety related resident engagement and this post will be working on implementation of the new Tenant Engagement Framework.</p> <p>The implementation of a breach self-referral process will be one of the initial key actions for the Housing Engagement and Performance Working Group.</p> <p>A gap analysis exercise has been carried out and this is being used to shape and prioritise key service improvement areas.</p> <p>HR are working with Housing to carry out an audit of Housing staff qualifications to ensure compliance with the new Chartered Institute of Housing requirements.</p> <p>Arrangements are now in place to report on the ten tenant satisfaction measures which became reportable from 1st April 2023. Band 1 procurement has been approved for consultancy to assist with recording the additional performance indicators which will be required to report on from March 2024.</p> |

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| <p>Building and Fire Safety Acts: To deliver the proposals set out in the new Building Safety/Fire Safety Acts which have established new legal duties for landlord and building owners of higher-risk residential buildings to keep their buildings safe, the following actions is planned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency evacuation training for residents of buildings in scope of the Acts • Inspect and develop a remedial programme of work for buildings in scope • Carry out fire door inspection programme • Develop floor and building plans for all housing stock within scope. • Implementation of a new Fire Risk Assessment Prioritisation Tool • Develop and install signage in buildings within scope | <p>Housing staff have received training to enable them to complete Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans and Housing Staff are completing these for residents of flat blocks in scope of the Act.</p> <p>All buildings within scope of the Act have been inspected and this has identified remedial work. Tenders for the remedial work will be out to market in November, with the preferred contractor identified in February 2024. Remedial work is expected to start April 2024. Leaseholders will need to pay for the remedial work to their properties.</p> <p>The fire door inspection programme is complete</p> <p>Floor and building plans have been developed for buildings within scope of the Act.</p> <p>The Fire Risk Assessment Prioritisation Tool has been implemented.</p> <p>Signage in flat blocks within scope of the legislation is scheduled to be installed by end of December 2023.</p> |