

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area All
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CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER ONE 2024/25

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To highlight the Council's performance across key priorities and projects for Quarter 1 2024/25 and provide an update on progress against Cost-of-Living support for residents and current strategic risks.
- 1.2 For Member's information, a presentation will be provided at the Cabinet meeting which will cover updates in relation to delivery against Corporate Plan Priorities and the key themes emerging from the Quarter 1 performance data.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the service performance against 49 corporate performance measures and delivery of key milestones in Quarter 1 2024/25 through the Making Stevenage Even Better Programme (Appendix A) be noted.
- 2.2 That the performance challenges in relation to rent collection (section 4.3.2) be noted, and the planned measures to improve performance be endorsed. That it

be noted that the challenges related to rent collection are not just specific to Stevenage.

2.3 That improvements to voids works management (4.3.9) be noted.

2.4 That the strategic risk updates (section 4.7) be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 In January 2024, the Cabinet agreed the new Making Stevenage Even Better (MSEB) Corporate Plan until 2027. This includes five strategic priorities:

- Transforming Our Town
- More Social, Affordable & Good Quality Homes
- Thriving Neighbourhoods
- Tackling Climate Change
- Balancing the Budget

The plan also includes three Cross-cutting themes:

- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Health & Wellbeing
- Technology & Innovation

The plan was subsequently approved at Full Council in February 2024. The corporate performance suite was also updated to reflect existing and future programmes of work, resident priorities and regulatory and legislative housing requirements.

3.2 The Council's approach to performance management demonstrates a clear link between service delivery and the strategic objectives in the MSEB Corporate Plan. By aligning performance measures and milestones under the 5 strategic priorities a 'golden thread' linking what the Council delivers, to the fulfilment of its strategic outcomes can be clearly seen. By taking this approach, the Council can simplify and streamline how performance monitoring and progress is communicated to Members and residents.

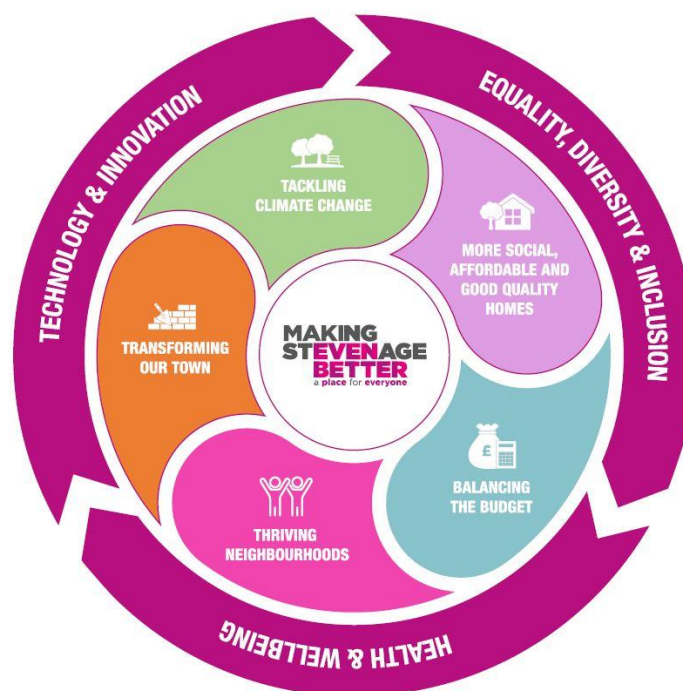


Fig 1.

- 3.3 The Council is committed to the delivery of its priorities and its local services, to the benefit of local residents and businesses. This is challenging in a very competitive, employee-driven market and there is a risk that not being able to retain, attract and recruit the right people and skills at all levels could continue to impact the Council's capacity to deliver all of its priorities as well as provide core services and implement new government legislation. The Council is continually reviewing its recruitment and retention approaches to strive to ensure it maintains the right capacity, skills, values and experience amongst staff at all levels.
- 3.4 The Corporate Performance Suite for 2024/25 contains 49 measures which are aligned with the 5 MSEB strategic priorities. There are also 13 measures relating to the Office for Local Government (OFLOG), these will be reported annually. The 49 measures are complemented by many statutory and local measures which are managed internally and overseen by the Strategic Leadership Team.
- 3.5 There are 19 baseline measures within the corporate performance suite. The majority of these reflect the increased regulation and focus on housing compliance in 2024/25. Baseline measures provide a starting point from which to assess and compare performance in future. The remaining 30 measures are relevant to the Council's focus on what matters to residents and progress against the MSEB objectives.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 QUARTER ONE CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

- 4.1.1 As outlined in section 3, the corporate performance suite has been aligned with the five MSEB priorities set out in Figure 1. In addition, during 2024/25 progress against performance measures has been presented alongside key programme milestones. By taking this mixed-method approach, the Council is able to present a holistic overview of its performance activity. This helps demonstrate to residents that the Council is on track to deliver key projects, programmes and service improvements associated with MSEB, as well as highlighting performance against key service delivery targets.
- 4.1.2 Key highlights from the MSEB programmes are summarised in section 4.2. For further information on the aims and objectives of the MSEB programme in 2024/25 please refer to MSEB Plan on a Page, which was presented to the Cabinet in July 2024 as Appendix C of the Corporate Performance Suite 2024/25 report: [MSEB Plan on a Page 2024/25 \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/mseb-plan-on-a-page-2024-25)
- 4.1.3 The total number of measures by Red, Amber & Green (RAG) rating is shown in Figure 2 below. For the purposes of this report, only commentary for Red Status measures is provided. The full set of current corporate performance measures results and MSEB milestones are attached at Appendix A.

Q1 2024/25 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW						
MSEB Programme	Baseline measure for 2024-25	Meeting or exceeding target	Amber Status (Within a manageable tolerance)	Red Status (Urgent improvement action required)	Unavailable Data	Milestones Reported Qtr. 1
More Social Affordable and Good Quality Homes (21 measures)	9	12	0	0	0	4
Transforming Our Town (3 measures)	0	3	0	0	0	4
Thriving Neighbourhoods (11 measures)	5	6*	0	0	0	1
	*The data for 'NI191: Residual household waste per household (kgs)' and 'NI192: Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting' comes from an external source and is only available a quarter in arrears, therefore will be reported this way					
Tackling Climate Change (1 measures)	0	1	0	0	0	3
Balancing the Budget (13 measures)	5	7	0	1	0	5
TOTAL (49)	19	29	0	1	0	17

Fig 2.

4.1.4 There are several strong areas of performance this quarter, these are highlighted below:

- The number of homes maintained as decent against the national minimum standard is 95.4% which is a significant rise since Quarter 1 of 2023/24 (82.44%).
- Compliance certification and documentation for Gas Safety, Fire Safety, Asbestos, Legionella and Lifts are all at 100%.
- Satisfaction with the CSC customer service is high at 92.8%, which is higher than any result in 2023/24.
- All Planning measures have achieved their targets, with 100% of major and minor applications being determined within target timescales.
- Garage voids as a percentage of stock is 6.99% which is significantly lower than Quarter 1 of 2023/24 (11.58%).

4.2 MSEB PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

4.2.1 Alongside performance, the council also captures quarterly updates on the milestones associated with the strategic priorities set out in the MSEB Corporate Plan and subsequent service planning and priority setting activities. All programmes have made progress on the projects agreed at Cabinet in July 2024, with Quarter 1 highlights including:

- The demolition of Hobbs Court has been completed as part of The Oval development. There will now be some additional ecology surveys taking place.
- A preferred design and supplier are now in place for improvements to the Brent Court Park. Work on site is expected to commence in the early Autumn subject to the lead time on equipment.
- The development of Brodie Court has been completed, delivering 88 one and two bed independent living apartments. Former residents of Walpole Court started moving in during August and will all be moved in by September 2024.
- To support the council's ongoing Major Refurbishment Contract external funding has been awarded through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Delivery is already underway with works in progress on a number of flat blocks.
- Full compliance with the Decent Homes standard is on track with a programme of significant capital works being delivered throughout the town contributing to compliance with the standard.
- The regeneration communications strategy has been devised. The five key themes are; Connectivity, Town Centre Living, Jobs & Skills, Public Realm and Sports & Leisure.
- The 'Stevenage First' commercial approach was launched, and many officers attended the 'New Approach to Contract Management' training.
- An event was held for International Women's Day, and an informal business networking event supported by the council. This was attended by the mayor.
- For the second year running a 'Meet the Buyer' event held and supported by 90+ representatives from local businesses. The initiative was part of the council's wider Sustainability Support programme to support wider contract readiness support for local businesses. The event provided an overview of the wider regeneration and development opportunities. This event was also supported by the procurement team to provide information on the regulations and to ensure greater access to contract opportunities.
- A funding scheme is now in place for the Climate Change Community Fund, with a new website and application form created and published online.
- The delivery of the third year of the UK Shared Prosperity funding is underway, with Junction7 continuing the street art project in collaboration with telecom companies to paint a selection cabinet around the town centre. So far, four cabinets have been completed, with plans to paint three in the coming months. Efforts to continue to remove graffiti are still ongoing with £30k being allocated to complement the work undertaken through the previous blitz activities, all with the objective of mitigate graffiti levels.
- The cabinet has approved the Stevenage Works Skills Framework to solidify the council's ambitions around Enterprise & Skills. Integral to this has been the involvement of key strategic partners including; Mission44, North Hertfordshire College, Hertfordshire Futures, the University of Hertfordshire and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- The Discovery Phase of the Pioneering Young STEM Futures programme, delivered in partnership with Mission44 is now completed. A summit event

was held at Knebworth House to share case studies and establish the next steps with key stakeholders.

4.2.2 Further details on the projects included in the MSEB programmes and corporate highlights can be found in Appendix A.

4.3 PERFORMANCE MEASURES – AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

4.3.1 As highlighted in Figure 2, one measure did not meet its target in Quarter 1. The table below outlines the actual performance and the target that was set for the performance measure. The paragraphs that follow set out the reasons why performance has been below expectation in Quarter 1 and the activities in place to address this.

<u>MEASURE NAME</u>	<u>BUSINESS UNIT</u>	Actual - Quarter 1 2023/24 YTD	Actual - Quarter 2 2023/24 YTD	Actual – Quarter 3 2023/24 YTD	Actual - Quarter 4 2023/24 YTD	Actual - Quarter 1 2024/25 YTD	Actual - Quarter 1 2024/25 YTD	Target - Quarter 2 2024/25 YTD
Balancing the Budget								
BV66a: Rent Collection Rate	Housing Management	92.4%	95.14%	95.96%	97.46%	89.44%	92.4%	95.14%

Fig.3

BV66a: Rent Collection Rate

4.3.2 Income collection for Q1 end of June 2024 is 89.44%, this is below the set target of 92.40%. This is largely due to the high amount of arrears brought forward from 2023/24, £1,066,658.29.

4.3.3 The arrears level is 2.6%, a decrease of 0.08% this quarter in comparison to Quarter 1 2023/24.

4.3.4 A number of factors are directly impacting income collection and arrears recovery, including:

- A high number of tenants are in receipt of Universal Credit (UC). Of the 2,668 tenants on UC as of the end of June 2024, 1,825 of these were in arrears totalling £1,121,381.54, contributing to over 80.11 % of the overall gross arrears. The number of those in receipt of Universal Credit and in arrears is 49.85% of total arrears cases.
- There is a reduction in tenants in receipt of Housing Benefits. There are now 26.16% of current tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit. This is likely to be a direct result of the increase in tenants in receipt of Universal Credit.
- Where tenants on benefits are in arrears, DWP and Courts usually award the minimum repayment amount of rent plus £4.75 per week mandated by the government. At this level, this would equate to £242 in reduced arrears over a year.
- The reduced Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) budget has resulted in more people being refused and those who are in receipt of DHP are receiving lower amounts. The amount of DHP allocated for 2024/25 is £141,827. There have been 214 DHP applications this quarter, of those 60

have been paid totalling £42,970. Ongoing effort is to target tenants under occupying through planned events and encourage them to downsize and this is supported by the revised Under Occupation Policy and dedicated Under Occupying officer.

- More cases are being referred to Citizens Advice and the internal Welfare Benefit and Debt team for support. The income services team has referred 413 cases between Jan-Jun 2024. These are still taking longer to resolve due to the high complexity levels, nature and urgency of support needed e.g., guidance on what benefits to apply for and assistance with UC applications that need to be dealt with immediately.
- New court practice regulations have resulted in Judges favouring Adjournment on Terms over Suspended Possession Orders (SPOs). Since the start of Q1, the council has been granted 19 possession orders with arrears totalling £40,764. However, these are often ordered at the government mandated minimum of £4.75 per week.

4.3.5 The Council's Income team is proactively working to maximise income collected and sustain the level of arrears as outlined below.

- 103 Notices of seeking possession (NSP) were served in Q1 2024/25 (in comparison to 121 in Q1 2023/24).
- There were 22 court application cases in Q1 2024/25 (in comparison to 9 in Q1 2023/24).
- There have been no evictions in Q1 2024/25

4.3.6 Currently 1,059 tenants have repayment arrangements in place (of those, 13% through DD arrangements, 24% through Court Orders and 63 % through other arrangements). This figure is in line with other stock holding local authorities. This figure is expected to increase throughout the year dropping at the end of the year when many tenants clear the arrears, as a result of both Christmas and End of Year campaigns that encourage tenants to clear their accounts. Outlined below is a breakdown of current arrangements:

- 142 Direct Debit payers who are working and have rent arrears, £60 extra is collected towards arrears each month.
- 731 Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs) for rent payments and of those 570 are in arrears totalling £476,864.67.
- 448 Third Party Deductions (TPD) for rent arrears and water rates (TPD) are deducted from tenants' benefits on a monthly basis with a total of £25,036.28 paid four weekly in arrears. For most of these cases, DWP pays £4.75 per week the minimum set recovery amount by the government.
- There are currently 6 cases in the breathing space initiative with total arrears of £14,269.22.

4.3.7 Due to the ongoing high levels of debt outstanding a decision has been taken to extend the Council's Income Recovery Action Plan by a further 2 years 2024-26. The focus continues to be on the following areas:

- Support for customers - ensuring that all tenants have access to money advice and systems are in place to identify vulnerable households/tenants at risk of being unable to pay for rent, fuel, or food (rent arrears is a potential indicator but there will be households who continue to pay the rent but cannot afford food or fuel).
- Working to mitigate the anticipated challenges such as tenant welfare, increased level of arrears and demand on services, tenant engagement and affordability.

- Continuing with a direct debit take up campaign.
- Carry out a tenant's wellbeing day whereby officers will visit targeted groups of tenants.
- Visit all tenants on housing benefits that are affected by the benefit cap.
- Continuing collaborative work with external agencies to tap into financial support for our tenants' e.g., Stevenage Community Trust and CA to support those tenants experiencing financial challenges.
- Seeking ways to support tenants such as working with partners CA who can issue energy bill vouchers and in partnership with local food banks.

4.3.8 There is a performance clinic for income collection planned for September 2024 to identify further improvement actions.

Voids Update

4.3.9 The average relet time continues to be impacted by the backlog of voids generated in the previous year(s) due to the time taken to undertake works.

4.3.10 As of 1 April 2024 there were 70 voids with works in progress (WIP) but during Q1 this has reduced significantly and generally has been much closer to a typical WIP of circa 30 voids although this number fluctuates based on the number of new voids and the extent of works required. There are a significant proportion of voids which require major works due to their condition which impacts not only on the time taken but also the cost of void works. A report to Full Council in July requested additional budget allocation in 2024/25 to manage these cost pressures.

4.3.11 Further improvement in average relet times will be demonstrated through 2024/25, especially once the historic backlog of voids has been fully relet.

4.4 TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES (TSM)

4.4.1 Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) were introduced in 2023/24 as a regulatory requirement for all landlords in England. There are 22 TSMs – of which 12 are sourced from a tenant perception survey. The Council has commissioned Housemark and Service Insight to conduct the tenant perception surveys quarterly during 2024/25. The Council are required to complete at least 570 surveys for its stock size; however, for 2024/25, 1000 responses will be collated over the year to ensure further statistical accuracy. The aim is for 90% of surveys to be completed over the phone with the remaining 10% online.

4.4.2 In Quarter 1 for 2024/25, 264 surveys were completed 264 over the phone. The Q1 satisfaction results can be seen in the table below:

Ref	Question	Previous year (2023/24)	First quarter (2024/25)	Difference (+/-)
TP01	Overall satisfaction	56.0%	65.5%	+9.5%
TP02	Repairs service overall	62.7%	74.2%	+11.5%
TP03	Speed of repairs	52.4%	73.8%	+21.4%
TP04	Home is well-maintained	59.2%	68.8%	+9.6%
TP05	Home is safe	69.9%	78.3%	+8.4%
TP06	Listens to views and acts	44.9%	56.0%	+11.1%
TP07	Keeps tenants informed	50.9%	56.9%	+6.0%
TP08	Treats tenants fairly and with respect	70.2%	72.8%	+2.6%
TP09	Complaint handling	22.8%	39.7%	+16.9%
TP10	Communal areas are clean and well-maintained	53.3%	60.2%	+6.9%
TP11	Contribution to neighbourhood	47.7%	62.2%	+14.5%
TP12	ASB handling	49.5%	57.9%	+8.4%

Fig 4

4.4.3 The Council has seen an improvement across all twelve measures, ranging from a 2.6% increase in the previously highest score relating to treating tenants with fairness and respect which is now 72.8%, to a 21.4% increase for satisfaction with the speed of repairs increasing to 73.8%. The improved scores are further in line with those benchmarked by Housemark and other local authorities. However, it should be noted that the scores were achieved with 100% phone call surveys. Online responses expected in Quarter 2 and Quarter 3, are expected to impact the overall scores for 2024/25, as online results generally trend 2% below telephone-based ones. In addition to this, general data collection trends suggest that Spring and Summer results are often better than those collected during the rest of the year.

4.4.4 In addition to the twelve standard questions, the team have opted to ask two additional questions which will vary each quarter. For Quarter 1, tenants were asked for a reason behind their initial overall satisfaction score. A question was also asked about how tenants would like to report repairs in the future. Feedback is being used as part of the consultation into the new repairs and maintenance policy. The free text provided is being analysed and any issues reported by tenants who have given permission for their details to be shared have been reported to individual teams to make further contact where necessary. The overall themes of the free text are being compared with those identified in 2023/24, with the aim to help identify additional service improvements required.

4.5 COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT HANDLING

4.5.1 As set out within the Council Complaints Policy residents are able to contact either the Housing Ombudsmen, mainly for issues which relate to the Council as a landlord or the Local Government and Social Care for areas such as Homelessness, the Housing Register and associated advice.

4.5.2 Both Ombudsmen services will independently consider cases where they have been approached by residents and will then consider the required determination. In line with the Housing Ombudsmen's new Statutory Code of Complaint Handling, the Council is required to report the outcome of such cases, and this will be provided to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

- 4.5.3 The Q2 Corporate Performance Report will contain an update from the Monitoring Officer to report decisions upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. From then on, judgements and findings of both the Housing and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman will be reported quarterly alongside the council's performance information as part of this report.
- 4.5.4 In Q1 the Housing Ombudsmen completed its investigation of 3 complaints, the details of which are set out in Appendix B. As part of their judgements, the Ombudsmen will make a determination in the various elements of the complaints and then issue an Order to the Council for each of these.
- 4.5.5 Where cases are referred to the Ombudsmen by a resident it can take some time for the Housing Ombudsmen to complete their investigation and issue a determination, and so cases that have been determined by the Housing Ombudsmen in Quarter 1, relate back to 2022. The Council has reviewed all cases and complied with the relevant Orders. All cases are now considered closed.
- 4.5.6 The Council has reviewed its Complaints Policy in line with the latest regulatory and legal requirements. Details of this along with the Annual Self-Assessment of Complaint Handling against the Housing Ombudsmen's Code. This has seen the introduction of a new Member for Complaints (Housing) role within the Cabinet as well as the introduction of a fortnightly Housing Complaint Clinic with the purpose of reviewing trends and undertaking root cause analysis to help drive improvements and learning.
- 4.5.7 The Annual Housing Complaints and Service Improvement Report were considered initially by the Executive Housing Working Group, which is Chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and attended by other key Councillors including the Leader of the Council, prior to being approved by the Cabinet on 5 June 2024.
- 4.5.8 Complaint monitoring data illustrates that complaint handling satisfaction has improved substantially with the overall number of complaints reducing. Satisfaction with the way in which the council handles complaints has increased by 16.9% during Quarter 1.
- 4.5.9 The Housing Complaint Clinic is continuing to take a lead in monitoring and improving performance, Full details of this work and performance are presented as part of the Council's Quarterly Performance Framework.

4.6 COST OF LIVING

- 4.6.1 Following approval of the Cost of Living (CoL) Action Plan in October 2022, a number of activities were mainstreamed into service delivery across the Council and with partners. This recognises there is a significant amount of "business as usual" activity for the Council that is specifically targeted at supporting people facing financial, housing and other difficulties.
- 4.6.2 A vital component of CoL activities has been the work with partners to reach a broad range of residents in as many compelling ways as possible.
- 4.6.3 In Quarter 1, the Council has also continued to provide funding to Holy Trinity, St Hugh and St John Churches and the Salvation Army for their warm space cafés and craft clubs. Dedicated pages covering the Stevenage Warm Spaces Network (launched in November 2022) are regularly updated and information is also promoted via community noticeboards, direct mail, the Chronicle magazine and Community Associations, recognising that not all residents have digital means to access information.

- 4.6.4 The Council continues to administer the Household Support Fund Scheme. A total of £50,000 will be distributed to groups and organisations that are directly supporting Stevenage residents with food and energy poverty. The current funding must be allocated by the council by the 30th of September 2024, there is currently no commitment to continue this funding beyond the current deadline, although this could be subject to change.
- 4.6.5 The funding is split with £37,500 for food poverty support and £12,500 for energy support. Groups that have been supported previously include foodbanks, daycare support centres and community cafes offering free food and refreshments, along with social interaction and support.

4.7 STRATEGIC RISK

- 4.7.1 The strategic risks were considered by Corporate Risk Group on 24 July 2024, agreed by the Senior Leadership Team on 20 August 2024 and were considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 4 September 2024.
- 4.7.2 The Audit Committee receives a detailed Strategic Risk Report each quarter. The report to the Audit Committee considers the actions which have been identified to mitigate each of the identified risks and the progress of those actions. Changes to the way risk is managed at the Council are also highlighted and considered by the Audit Committee. Where the Committee raises specific concerns about the risks or the process for managing them, these are highlighted to the Cabinet within this quarterly report.

HIGHLIGHTED RISKS

- 4.7.3 There were no changes to any risk scores this quarter. Work continues to progress the actions to mitigate high and very high risks. For further information on the mitigations in place please contact the Corporate Policy & Business Support Team at policy@stevenage.gov.uk.

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 delivering the priorities over the coming year and implementing any improvement activity set out within this report will need to identify and consider any resulting financial implications. Any financial impact of the under/over achievement of Corporate Performance Indicators will be reported as part of the Quarterly Monitoring report.

5.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.2.1 There are no direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for delivering the priorities over the coming year and implementing any improvement activity set out within this report will need to identify and consider any resulting legal implications.

5.3 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.3.1 There are no direct equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising from this report. Where required, Equality Impact Assessments will be completed for programmes, projects, service changes and improvement activity identified.

5.4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). However, officers responsible for implementing any improvement activity set out within this report will need to consider any risk implications that arise.
- 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 provides good governance assurance.

5.5 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.5.1 The Council declared a climate change emergency in June 2019 with a resolution to work towards a target of achieving net zero emissions by 2030. There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report, except for those activities that seek to have a positive impact in this area, and the officers responsible for delivering the improvements will need to identify and address any climate change considerations in the implementation of activities.

5.6 OTHER CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.6.1 Implementing the priorities and improvement activity outlined in this report may impact on the development of future policy or procedure, which will be monitored through the formal policy/procedure sign-off process via the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

6 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Strategic Risk Register (Part II Audit Committee Report)
- Annual Governance Statement 2024/25
- [MSEB Plan on a Page 2024/25 \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/mseb-plan-on-a-page-2024-25)

7 APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Compendium of Performance Results Quarter One 2024/25
- Appendix B: Ombudsman Determinations Quarter One 2024/25