

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Scrutiny Committee – 30th September 2020

Corporate Performance Report, Month 4, 2020/21

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member Ross Henley.

Report Author: Malcolm Riches, Business Intelligence and Performance Manager.

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

This paper provides the performance information for a range of key indicators for the first 4 months (April – July) of the 2020/21 financial year. In addition to the usual report on key performance indicators, due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the impact this has had on the council, this report also contains some data to provide an overview of some of the additional work the council has undertaken.

2. Recommendations

Councillors are asked to consider the attached performance report.

3. Risk Assessment

Failure to regularly monitor performance could lead to the council not delivering on some of its corporate priorities.

4. Background and Full details of the Report

As part of the Councils commitment to transparency and accountability this report provides performance information for a number of indicators across a range of council services.

4.1 Pandemic Response

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic started during March 2020, and has been ongoing throughout recent months and has had a significant impact on the work of the Council during the period covered by this performance report (April, May, June and July).

There have been separate briefings to provide detailed updates on the additional work of the council, and this report does not aim to cover the entirety of the tasks undertaken. The information included below provides some facts and figures to give an overview of some of the ways in which the council has supported residents, especially those who are most vulnerable.

- 1) A total of 1,384 calls were routed to SWT from the countywide Coronavirus Helpline (April = 484, May = 415, June = 286, July = 199).

- 2) A letter was sent to all households where someone was shielding, and these were followed up by telephone calls to the most vulnerable (in excess of 500 homes where up to 3 phone calls were made, and, where no response was received there were 300 home visits required).
- 3) Food pack distribution was supported by local hubs and the SWT depot provided over 160 food parcels.
- 4) Rough sleepers were supported in new accommodation and 42 were housed at Canonsgrove, and 20 at the Beech Hotel (with ARC and YMCA support).
- 5) A new web based process was designed and implemented for Business Grants. SWT have processed over 3,500 applications & have paid out over £41m to eligible businesses.
- 6) A new web based process was also designed and implemented for Discretionary Business Grants from 1st June. SWT have processed over 340 applications & have paid out over £2m.
- 7) Over £27m additional business rate reliefs were applied to 1,300 accounts and removed liability to pay rates for this year. This was completed with 2 weeks and involved processing over 3,000 accounts manually to assess eligibility.
- 8) Applied one-off £150 awards to 7,017 working age Council Tax Support claims, exceeding £1m in total.
- 9) Reviewed and extended the awards for 285 Discretionary Housing Payment claims to provide ongoing help to people to pay their rent.
- 10) Recalculated 1,693 Housing Benefit claims following the Government's announcement to increase both the additional earnings disregard in Working Tax Credit cases and Local Housing Allowance rates, providing additional support for people to help pay their rent.
- 11) The Council's terms for paying suppliers were changed to enable much quicker payments. During April and May, £6.4m was paid with an average turnaround time for processing invoices of 4.8 days.

4.2 Key Performance Indicators

The table in Appendix 1 includes the council's Key Performance Indicators and shows how the council has performed for the first 4 months of the 2020/21 financial year.

For the majority of indicators the target has either been met or in many cases, has been exceeded. For the 2 indicators where performance is significantly below target, and the indicator is rated "Red", commentary is provided below:

Number of complaints responded to in 10 working days

The figures shown in the summary cover the first four months of this financial year (i.e. to 1 Aug 2020). During this period we received a total of 449 complaints, which equated to a 19% increase when compared against the same period in the previous

year. Our response rate within ten working days was 41% against a target of 90%.

Obviously during this period the organisation was dealing with the impact of Covid 19 and significant amounts of resource were reallocated to respond to the crisis. This has had an impact on our ability to promptly investigate and respond to complaints in some areas.

We have commenced a detailed 'Root Cause Analysis' of our complaints, which is ongoing. The initial phase of this work has involved a more detailed analysis of complaints service-by-service, a summary of which is included in Appendix 2.

In addition we have recently boosted the resource allocated to managing the complaints process to help speed up the process and to assist with dealing with enquiries from Members.

The detailed analysis has identified:

- A significant increase in the number of Waste Services complaints between 2019 (47) and 2020 (200). These account for 45% of all complaints. The increase is primarily due to difficulties the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) experienced in maintaining routine collections during the Covid crisis and in delivering new bins. We have met with SWP to discuss these issues. They are in the process of changing suppliers which should resolve the issue regarding the delays supplying new bins.
- The increases in other areas are not significant in terms of actual numbers of complaints.
- The number of complaints received have fallen in a number of areas. This is likely to be linked to Covid and reflects a lack of activity in areas that would normally generate complaints e.g. Revenues enforcement.

The next phase of the Root Cause Analysis exercise is looking at gaining a detailed understanding of why customers are making complaints. We already undertake high level analysis, which indicates that 50% of complaints relate to service provision and 20% to quality, but undertaking detailed analysis will enable us to identify and target process improvement changes to service delivery in those areas.

Our aim remains to change our approach to complaints. We want to build an organisation that takes the intelligence provided by complaints and uses it to achieve excellence. Complaints need to be given high priority and we actively need to learn from them and implement change.

Number of FOI requests responded to in 20 working days

To help improve performance a dedicated case manager was recruited last autumn to manage the FOI process, and a new process for submitting FOI requests has been implemented. This had led to significant improvements in performance and for January, 81% of FOIs were responded to on time.

The Covid crisis and the need to divert resource to urgent additional activities has clearly impacted on our ability to respond quickly to FOI requests. The Government

recognised that this would be an issue for Councils across the country and the regulator (the Information Commissioner) has stated that they will take a relaxed view on the statutory time limits in cases where a delay has been unavoidable.

We are now starting to pick up the reins on responding to FOI's again and have allocated more resource to assist with the administration of responses. We are also reviewing in more detail what we are receiving requests about and identifying where bottlenecks are occurring in services. The data collected will be used to identify where we need to make more information available on line and to identify areas where we need to look at resources, training and priorities.

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

This performance report and future development of it will be a key tool for helping to monitor progress with the implementation of the Corporate Strategy. The next performance report will also include an update on progress with the priority actions within the Corporate Strategy.

6. Finance / Resource Implications

The detailed financial out-turn position is available in a separate report.

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – Yes**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: **Once only** **Ad-hoc** Y **Quarterly**
 Twice-yearly **Annually**

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix 1	2020/21 Month 4 Performance Report
Appendix 2	Further information on complaints

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