

DRAFT

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Scrutiny Committee – 1st September 2021 / Executive – 15th September 2021

Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 4 and Out-turn, 2020/21

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

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1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

This paper provides an update on the council's performance for the first quarter (1st April 2021 – 30th June 2021) of the 2021/22 financial year. The report includes information for a range of key performance indicators and includes the key business risks for the council.

2. Recommendations

Councillors are asked to consider the 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 an update on performance for a number of key indicators. The pandemic continues to have a significant impact and the council's response is being achieved in addition to the regular day-to-day responsibilities.

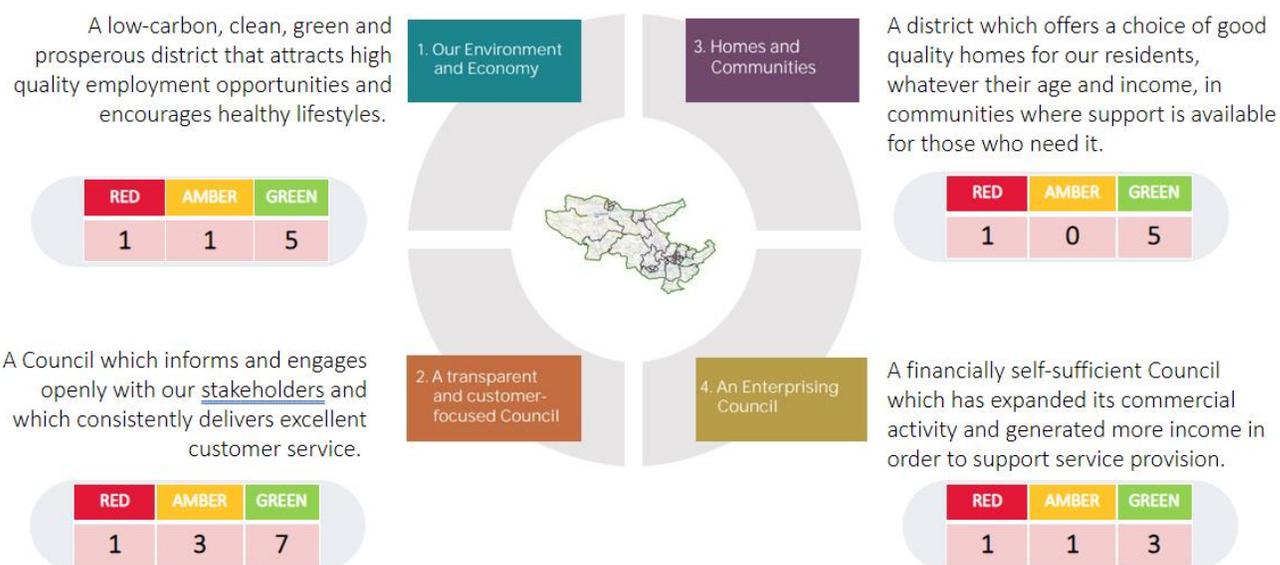
4.1 Key Performance Indicators

The table in Appendix 1 includes the councils Key Performance Indicators and shows how the council has performed for the first quarter of 2021/22 financial year. For this financial year, the number of key performance indicators has been increased so that more council services are included. The table includes a "direction of travel" arrow to show whether performance has improved, worsened or stayed the same, since the end of 2020/21.

The key performance indicators have also been aligned to the 4 key themes of the Corporate Strategy, and a summary of performance for each theme is shown on the image below:

Corporate Key Performance Indicators 2021/22 – Quarter 1

Somerset West
and Taunton



For the majority of indicators the target has either been met or, in many cases, has been exceeded. Overall there are 4 'Red' and 5 'Amber' indicators, which are being monitored closely. More information is provided below regarding the red and amber indicators.

Percentage of complaints responded to in 10 working days:

The percentage of complaints responded to in 10 days during the quarter was 86%, which is slightly below target. Although below target, 86% still represents a significant improvement on the position this time last year when only 50% of complaints were responded to on time. This demonstrates that the focussed work we are undertaking to address the way complaints are managed continues to be successful.

We also monitor the response rates monthly and have included those figures in Appendix 1. The monthly figures indicate a worsening response rate each month from April through to June (April: 89%, May: 86% and June: 83%). Clearly this is of concern so we have looked in detail at the reasons for this.

There is no single reason why the response rates have dropped. The number of complaints received during quarter 1 of this financial year (391) has increased significantly from those received in the final quarter of the previous financial year (247). Having a greater volume of complaints to deal with is presenting challenges in some areas in being able to respond within the target time frame during what is usually a very busy period. In addition, we are aware of a small number of complex cases, where, due to their complexity, it is not realistic for us to be able to respond within the timeframe.

We also now operate a two-stage complaints process. 31 of the 391 complaints received during quarter 1 are second stage appeals, which we would not previously have received under the single stage process in operation last year.

The increase in the number is in part seasonal and is also reflective of the ongoing issues we are experiencing with waste collection and in response to our switching back on our full debt recovery processes for unpaid debts and taxes. In addition, these issues are generating increased numbers of telephone calls and an increased number of resultant complaints where we are unable to answer those calls in a timely manner.

We reviewed our complaints process last year, introduced changes, provided training and have continued to maintain a focus on complaints response times. Overall these changes and focus on complaints continues to deliver significantly improved response times. Action is being taken to address the issues which have generated additional complaints during quarter 1.

Average call wait times:

The aim is to answer calls within 60 seconds, but for June, the average call answering time was 113 seconds. The target has not been met any month this quarter. This is as a result of an increased number of calls and due to the nature of the calls and an increase in the duration of the calls. Much of this is attributed to the unprecedented issues currently being faced by the Somerset Waste Partnership and the contractor Suez. We have also restarted our normal recovery processes for Council Tax, Business Rates and miscellaneous income which has also influenced call volume and duration. Call performance has also been impacted by the reopening of the Customer Hubs which has drawn Customer Champions away from call handling to manning the offices. A more detailed update on the issues and our response is included in Appendix 2.

Percentage of Licensing applications processed within timescales:

The percentage of Licensing requests processed within timescales is 89%, against a target of 90%. Following a drop in performance during quarter 3 and 4 last year, performance has improved, and continues to do so. In April 86% of requests were completed on time, and this has increased to 90% in May and 91% in June.

Despite falling short of the target this quarter, the Licensing service have met all statutory obligations. The majority of applications not completed within the target timeframe were made in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 and received tacit consent; this is where a licence is treated as having been granted if the objection

period passes without an objection or the Licensing Authority does not determine the application within a prescribed time period. Tacit consent is something the Licensing service is wary of as it can, in some cases such as caravan site and pavement licensing, result in the granting of a licence without conditions which are required to uphold the principals and objectives of those regimes. This is not the case with applications made in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003, where conditions do apply whether that application receives tacit consent or not.

The delay in completing these Licensing Act 2003 applications was at the end of the process; issuing the licence document following the completion of all initial steps i.e. their being logged on the Licensing back office system, circulation to responsible authorities and determination following the objection period. This was part of a deliberate prioritisation and balancing of work pressures. The backfilling of vacant roles within the team has enabled the service to catch up and clear the bulk of this backlog, and the trajectory of improved performance is expected to continue.

Forecast budget variance for General Fund and for Housing Revenue Account.

Detailed commentary is included in the separate Budget Monitoring Report.

Cumulative percentage of the amount of Business Rates collected.

The Quarter 1 figure is 25.98% which is down 5.61% (£2.7 million) compared to the same period last year. However, a like for like comparison is impossible because the amount of Business Rates being collected rose significantly from 1 July 2021 from £23 million to £49 million. This is due to the ending of the Covid related 100% Retail Relief on 30 June 2021. We anticipate collection rates improving steadily over the year as businesses, who were previously receiving the 100% relief, start to pay the additional amounts that they have been billed. However, the raising of a significant additional debit part way through the year will skew the collection figures throughout this year and it will be difficult to predict the year end collection position.

The Council is in a much better position compared to last year because all recovery actions are back to normal. Automated monthly reminders and regular Summonses are both being issued prompting more cashflow. We are actively encouraging people and businesses who are experiencing difficulty in making payments to contact us in order that we can agree affordable payment arrangements with them. Unpaid court cases are now being sent to our Enforcement Agents and this will result in higher collection rates in the future.

Percentage of reported fly tipping incidents responded to in 5 working days.

The performance target for fly tipping is 80% to be collected within five working days. The performance for the quarter was 75% which is below the target of 80%. In April, performance was 71% and in May it was 66%. Importantly, this is not a failure to collect, but that the contractor has missed its target of collecting within five working days. This was due to a number of extenuating factors, including a rise in the amount of fly-tipping. The below target performance was addressed with the contractor, Idverde, at monthly contractual meetings and there has subsequently been a significant

improvement in performance in June to 93%. The contract continues to be tightly managed to ensure that a high level of performance is maintained.

Percentage of planning appeals that have had the decision overturned.

The number of planning appeals is generally low (there have been 48 in the past 12 months), and because of the low numbers, it only takes a few appeals to have a big impact on the percentage. Of the 48 appeals, 20 have had the decision overturned by the Planning Inspectorate. Of the decisions overturned 2 were Committee decisions where the officer recommendation was for approval.

For the indicators which measure the length of time taken to process planning applications, the nationally prescribed definition for these indicators calculates applications at the point when they are determined. Due to the current phosphates issues, there are approximately 100 planning applications on hold which equates to approximately 2300 dwellings. There are also 13 sites where the Council has not been able to discharge pre-commencement conditions and this affects approximately 450 dwellings.

Average re-let time in calendar days

The average re-let time for council properties over the past quarter was 52.1 days, and did not achieve the target of 44 days. This performance indicator is widely used by housing providers, and the target has been set to reflect national best practice. Good progress is being made towards achieving specific targets for both Major voids and Minor voids. However, there have been a higher proportion of major voids, which take longer, and this has a negative impact on the average re-let time which is why it is above target. This is a large area of work with approximately 100 voids every quarter. There are a number of challenges facing void work, particularly regarding some of the compliance issues, which are having an impact across the housing sector.

Performance for the indicator which measures the “Income collected as a percentage of rent owed, excluding arrears brought forward” is better the target, and is rated as green. The performance is over 100% because tenants have paid more than is due in the period i.e. they are paying towards their rent arrears as well as paying the current rent due in the period – in setting the target the formula assumes arrears balances brought forward are being excluded but the income tenants have actually paid towards their arrears is not being excluded.

4.2 Risk Management update

As outlined in the separate report on Risk Management in May, the quarterly Corporate Performance Reports will include an update on the key business risks and issues for the Council.

Processes are in place within each directorate to regularly review existing and identify any new risks. As new risks are identified they are included on the risk register and

mitigations are identified and planned. A target date is set as to when the mitigations should be in place, and a lead officer is appointed.

The risks are all scored based on their probability and potential impact. Risks with a higher score are likely to have a more detailed mitigation plan. Issues are things which have already happened, so they are not scored in the same way as risks, but they have a RAG status which relates to the severity of the issue.

As of the end of June there were 6 Key Business Risks (with a score of 15 or higher) on the risk register.

Key Business Risks at 30th June:

REF	Corporate Objective	Risk area	Risk Title	Risk Score			Owner
				Impact	Probability	Overall score	
CR11	A Transparent and Customer Focused Council	ICT	Cyber security threats.	4	4	16	Alison North
CR15	Our Environment and Economy	Emergency Planning	Civil contingencies and organisational resilience	5	3	15	Stuart Noyce
CR22	A Transparent and Customer Focused Council	Health and Safety Compliance	Failure of Risk Assessment process for staff operations leading to incident or near miss.	4	4	16	Alison North
CR23	Homes and Communities	Health and Safety Compliance	Failure to comply with Landlord Property Safety Compliance requirements leading to regulatory failure, failure to comply with the law, incident causing injury or death, negative PR, and financial loss (compensation and / or fine).	4	4	16	James Barrah
CR27	All	Unitary	Maintaining operational delivery during period of significant change.	4	4	16	James Hassett
CR29	Our Environment and Economy	Major contracts	Delay in "Recycle More" project	5	4	20	Stuart Noyce

As of the end of June the Corporate Issues Log contained 2 Issues that had a red RAG status.

Red rated Issues from the Corporate Issues Log at 30th June:

REF	Directorate	Issue Title	RAG	Owner
CI 8	Internal Ops	Improvements in ICT infrastructure and connectivity to meet required standards.	R	Sean Papworth
CI 9	Dev & Place	Management of phosphate levels in Tone catchment, particularly regarding impact on planning applications.	R	Gerry Mills

The risk register and issues log are updated as necessary and new risks/issues can be added at any point. They are routinely reviewed each month through the regular cycle of meetings. The lead officer is responsible for updating the risk register with progress made regarding mitigations, and this is reported back to Directorate performance meetings, and to the Corporate Performance Board where SMT review the key risks monthly.

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

This performance report provides an update on Corporate Performance which is fundamental to the implementation of the Corporate Strategy.

6. Finance / Resource Implications

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

