

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 1st December 2021

Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 2 2021/22

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 half of the 2021/22 financial year (1st April 2021 – 30th September 2021). The report includes information for a range of key performance indicators and also provides an update on progress against the council's annual plan commitments for the year. The report also includes the key business risks for the council.

2. Recommendations

This report is to be noted as the Council's performance report for quarter 2.

3. Risk Assessment

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

4. Background and Full details of the Report

As part of the Council's commitment to transparency and accountability this report provides an update on performance. The Covid pandemic continues to have an impact and the Council's response is being achieved in addition to the regular day-to-day responsibilities. Specifically, the report provides:

- A progress update against the actions to deliver the Council's Annual Plan at the end of the first six months of the financial year;
- The position in respect of our key performance indicators at the end of quarter 2 of the financial year; and
- A summary of the Council's key business risks and issues together with the current status of the actions being taken to respond to them.

4.1 Summary of Performance

The Council's Corporate Strategy contains four priority strategic themes. Each year the Council produces a plan (the Annual Plan) to identify actions to assist in the delivery of the four strategic priorities. The plan for this year identifies 31 actions.

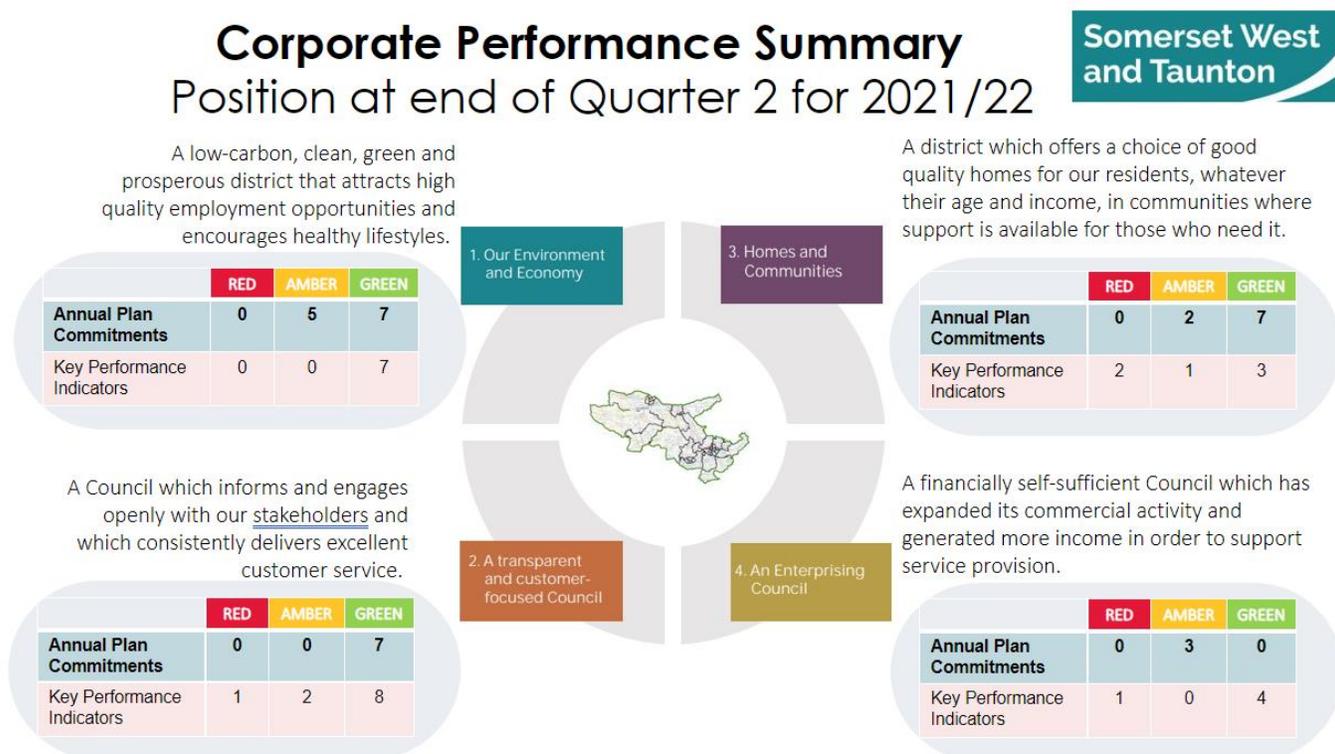
In addition, we monitor progress against a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). These KPI's are used to monitor progress in delivering key services and to enable us to quickly identify and rectify any problem areas. We have also linked each of these KPI's to the four corporate priorities to indicate where they support the delivery of those priorities.

The graphic below provides an overview of performance as at 30 September 2021 against the 31 commitments in the Annual Plan and our Key Performance Indicators.

Each commitment has been rated as either Red, Amber or Green to indicate whether we are on schedule.

Full details of the progress to date against each of the KPIs and the Annual Plan actions can be found in appendices 1 & 2 below.

In summary this indicates that of the 31 Annual Plan commitments, 21 are Green, 10 are Amber, and none are Red. Of the Key Performance indicators, 22 are Green, 3 are Amber and 4 are Red.



4.2 Key Performance Indicators

The table in Appendix 1 includes the councils Key Performance Indicators and shows how the council has performed for the first half of the 2021/22 financial year. The table includes a “direction of travel” arrow to show whether performance has improved, worsened, or stayed the same, since the end of Quarter 1.

For the majority of indicators the target has either been met or, in many cases, has been exceeded. Overall there are 4 ‘Red’ and 3 ‘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 for the first half of this year is 83%, which is below the target of 90%. Although below target, 83% still represents a significant improvement on the position at this time last year. This demonstrates that the focussed work we are undertaking to address the way complaints are managed continues to be mostly successful.

The monthly figures indicate a stabilisation of this years downward trend in response rates between April and September (April: 89%, May: 86% and June: 83%, July 77%, August 77%, September 77%). Clearly this is still of concern and it’s worth briefly covering the reasons for this as detailed in last quarter’s report.

The number of complaints received has increased significantly from those received in the previous financial year. Higher volumes of complaints present challenges in some areas in being able to respond within the target time. We are also receiving a number of more complex complaints, where, due to their complexity, it is not realistic for us to be able to respond within the timeframe. Customer expectations are also increasing and there is growth in complaints being registered, this is a trend reported sector wide and also by the Housing Ombudsman (April-June 2021, 21% increase in volume of enquiries and complaints and 230% increase compared to complaints received April-June 2020).

Additionally, we now operate a two-stage complaints process in line with Local Government Ombudsman guidance and the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code. 65 complaints received so far this year are second stage ‘appeals’, which we would not previously have received under the single stage process in previous years.

The increase in the number is also reflective of the ongoing issues we experienced with waste collection between May and September and in response to our resuming full debt recovery processes for unpaid debts and taxes. These issues generated increased numbers of telephone calls and an increased number of resultant complaints where we were 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. Over 70 staff within the Housing Directorate have received training by the Housing Quality Network

to improve the quality of responses. Overall these changes and focus on complaints continues to deliver significantly improved response times.

Average call wait times:

The aim is to answer calls within 60 seconds, but for September, the average call answering time was 177 seconds.

This results from an increased number of calls, the challenging nature of the calls and an increase in the duration of those calls. Much of this is attributed to the unprecedented issues faced by Somerset Waste Partnership and the contractor Suez over the last five months. We have also resumed 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. This has drawn Customer Champions away from call handling in order to staff the hubs. Whilst footfall in the hubs is low, we have to maintain a minimum staffing level to ensure we can deal with customers when they do visit our offices.

Recruitment to fill existing vacancies and of additional temporary agency staff has been completed and our new team members are now trained and able to handle calls. This has had the desired effect and our performance targets have been achieved for the beginning of October 2021. This improvement will take some time to affect the overall results.

Forecast budget variance for Housing Revenue Account.

Detailed commentary for this indicator is included in the separate Budget Monitoring Report.

Cumulative percentage of the amount of Business Rates collected.

The cumulative figure at the end of Quarter 2 is 52.79% which is down 6.7% (£3.5 million) compared to the same period last year. However, a like for like comparison between this year and last is impossible because the amount of Business Rates being collected rose significantly from £23 million last year to this year's £49 million. This significant in-year increase in debit skews our collection forecasts. The in-year debit increase is due to the ending of the Covid related 100% Retail Relief. We anticipate collection rates improving steadily over the next 6 months with an increase in our recovery actions and businesses starting to return to a sense of normality.

The Council is in a much better position compared to last year. Automated monthly reminders and regular Summonses are both being issued increasing cashflow. We are actively encouraging people and businesses who are having trouble in making payments to contact us in order that we can agree affordable payment arrangements with them. Shown below is a snapshot of our recovery stages to show case

progression from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2. It should be noted that in year collection is monitored daily by the Income Specialist and Revenue managers.

Recovery Stage	End of June	End of September
Bill	26 million	17 million
Reminder	4.8 million	3.6 million
Final Notice	631k	2.3 million
Liability Order/Pre-Bailiff	431k	109k
With Bailiff	0	171k
Bailiff Return	0	8k

Number of families in B&B for over 6 weeks.

The performance indicator reports on the position as at the end of the quarter. On the 30 September 2021 there was one family that had been in B&B for more than 6 weeks. This is the only time during the past quarter that a family has been in this situation and for the whole of July and August, this did not happen at all. Temporary accommodation was identified for the family, but their ability to occupy was delayed due to a significant amount of work being required before it could be let.

In order to avoid this happening again we have put in place a change of focus in the weekly meetings designed to identify those cases where we may need to look at alternative solutions if temporary accommodation is not available. We have also focused an officer entirely on moving-on those in temporary accommodation in order to free this up for those either in B&B or ideally for customers to move straight into when required. Currently we have a huge pressure on two bed properties and so we are particularly focusing on these. In order to assist in the quicker turn-around of properties we have started regular inspections of temporary accommodation properties to ensure tenants are keeping them to a good standard.

Average re-let times.

The average re-let time for council properties over the past quarter was 52.7 days, which exceeded our target of 44 days. This is a particularly challenging time for void management and conversations with directors across the Somerset Housing sector have shown that all Housing Providers are struggling with increasing void times. Common factors include scarcity of key tradespeople (such as electricians), both in-house and through external contractors, many of whom have been attracted to other work such as Hinkley; and lack of availability of some materials, which inevitably holds up work. For SWT, we have also noted a higher proportion of Major Voids (compared to Minor Voids) which skews our turnaround times higher. That said, we are working on a plan to improve void turnaround times. The plan includes:

- Strengthening our approach with departing tenants to ensure they leave the property clean and tidy
- Providing decoration packs for able-bodied tenants, rather than undertaking full redecoration to let the property quicker
- Investigating how we streamline the asbestos process to reduce delays due to surveys and works

- Implementation of the voids module on Open Housing which will allow improved performance management of the overall voids process
- Look to undertake major capital works as part of the capital programme where possible, after the tenant moves in, rather than during the void. This will also be more cost effective through economies of scale.
- We will undertake a 'deep dive' review with Homes in Sedgemoor to compare approaches and share best practice
- Explore voids inspections and scheduling software that can lead to a more efficient inspection and scheduling of trades staff into the properties and flag up capacity issues to allow earlier resolution.

Performance for the indicator which measures the "Income collected as a percentage of rent owed, excluding arrears brought forward" is above the target, and is rated as green. The performance is slightly 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.

Completion of emergency housing repairs in 24 hours.

The target is to complete 100% of emergency repairs within 24 hours. Our performance of 99.9% represents one emergency repair in the last six months that took 15 minutes longer to complete than the 24 hour target.

4.3 Annual Plan Commitments

Progress against the actions contained in the Annual Plan is reported every six months. This report provides an update on the position as at 30 September 2021.

In total, 21 of the 31 commitments are rated as Green, meaning that progress was as anticipated at the start of the financial year. There are 10 commitments which are rated as Amber, meaning that there has been some slippage. None of the commitments are rated as Red. A more detailed update on each individual commitment is included in Appendix 2.

4.4 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 and issues. As new risks or issues are identified they are included on

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix 1	Key Performance Indicators Report for Q2
Appendix 2	Annual Plan Commitments update
Appendix 3	Corporate Risk Register – Key Business Risks
Appendix 4	Corporate Issues
Appendix 5	Risk Scoring Matrix

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