

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021

### Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 4 and Outturn, 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 an update on the council's performance for the 2020/21 financial year. 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. This year, the council has also played a significant role in the response to the pandemic and this report includes a summary of the additional work undertaken. Finally, the report also includes the key business risks for the council.

#### 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 Council's commitment to transparency and accountability this report provides an update on performance for a number of key indicators across a range of council services and also provides progress monitoring for the implementation of the Corporate Strategy, and the delivery of the commitments made in the 2020/21 Annual Plan. The past year has been exceptional and the pandemic has resulted in unprecedented circumstances. The council's response to the pandemic has been significant, and this has been achieved in addition to the regular day-to-day responsibilities.

##### 4.1 Impact of Covid-19

This report does not attempt to capture all of the additional work the council has undertaken in the past year in response to the pandemic. In many cases, the response has required setting up completely new services or processes. Among the many measures implemented since restrictions were announced SWT has:

- Distributed more than £65m of business support grants to businesses in our district by end March 21.
- Responded to the 'Everyone In' mandate from government to identify, set up and manage safe self-contained accommodation for rough sleepers in our District. This required the establishment of accommodation at Canonsgrove in

Trull and the Beach Hotel in Minehead which, at its peak, was accommodating around 70 people. This project achieved national recognition and has undoubtedly saved and changed lives.

- We supported over 750 of our housing tenants with advice to maximise income and minimise debt, issued food parcels and vouchers toward energy costs.
- Distributed £250,000 in community chest funding to small organisations to help them respond to the pandemic.
- Invested £500,000 to help the town centres of Taunton, Minehead and Wellington with a programme of emergency measures designed to aid these vital social and economic hubs.
- Administered 508 successful awards of Test and Trace self-isolation payments, paying to low income households who were told to self-isolate.
- Implemented the Council Tax Hardship Funding received from central Government and applied payments of up to £150 to 7017 working age Council Tax Support claimants
- Reviewed and extended the awards for 285 Discretionary Housing Payment claims to provide ongoing help to people to pay their rent.
- Recalculated 1,693 Housing Benefit claims providing additional support for people to help pay their rent.
- Provided Business Rate relief to 1,300 qualifying business rate accounts and removed their liability to pay rates for this year.
- Made calls to 3,500 tenants and 600 other potentially vulnerable residents to check if they need help.
- Delivered more than 150 food boxes to people who are shielding and those facing hardship.
- Helped the NHS make Vaccination Appointments; contacting 48,000 people.

## 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 2020/21 financial year. The table also includes a “direction of travel” arrow to show whether performance has improved, worsened or stayed the same, since the last corporate performance report which was for the end of December.

For the majority of indicators the target has either been met or, in many cases, has been exceeded. The direction of travel shows that since the end of December performance has reduced slightly for 4 of the indicators, but the majority of them are still within target. Overall there are 3 ‘Red’ and 2 ‘Amber’ indicators, which are being monitored closely. More information is provided below regarding the red and amber indicators.

For the indicators that were marked as red as the end of Q2 and Q3 (Complaint and FOI response timescales), monthly figures have been included to show how performance has improved significantly over the last 3 months.

*Number of complaints responded to in 10 working days*

The performance indicator remains red and below target. Realistically, as the indicator is cumulative, the year-end figure was likely to remain below target. In view of the poor performance identified earlier in the year a significant amount of work has been put into both improving response times and identifying changes and improvements to the process. This work is continuing to pay dividends and the monthly trend over the past 3 months shows clear and sustained improvement, with performance in March up to 93%.

#### *Number of FOI requests responded to in 20 working days*

Again this has been an area of focus in view of the poor performance identified earlier in the year. However, this indicator also needs to be considered against the backdrop of the Covid crisis and the steer from Government that local authorities could relax their response times to FOI requests in order to focus on immediate Covid related priorities. The figures for the last three months demonstrated continued improvement, and have exceeded the target every month. For March, 91% were responded to on time.

#### *Percentage of Licensing Requests processed within timescales*

As reported at the end of quarter 3, the percentage of licensing applications processed within timescales has fallen short of the target. There was a drop in performance last autumn, but the last 3 months have seen sustained improvement from 84% in January, to 87% in February and up to 91% in March.

Despite falling short of the target, 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.

#### *Business Rates & Council Tax Collection Rates*

The cumulative collection rates for both were below target.

	Last Year, 31 Mar 20	This year, 31 Mar 21	Shortfall
Business Rates	96.92%	92.16%	-4.76% (£1.354m)
Council Tax	97.71%	96.78%	-0.93% (£1.022m)

Note: The Council collects business rates and council tax on behalf of all preceptors within the district. The income that is collected is distributed in proportion to:

- Business Rates: 50% to central government, 40% to SWTC, 9% to Somerset County Council and 1% to Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority.
- Council Tax: Pre precepts set by Somerset County Council, the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority, SWTC, and town / parish councils. On average, SWTC receives 9% of council tax collected in 2020/21.

In recognition of the impact on collection resulting from Covid the Government provided additional funding to top-up Council Tax Support claims. In addition, Government have provided £29m to subsidise the business rates “holiday” for retail, hospitality, leisure and nursery premises.

The Covid crisis has had a significant impact on business rates collection in particular and in number of different ways, as detailed below:

- The amount we raise (the net collectable debit) in 2020/2021 nearly halved from normal levels of £60m to £33m. This was mainly due to the extended relief (giving a year's payment holiday) to all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses.
- Many businesses have been significantly impacted by the Covid crisis and this has hampered the ability of some businesses in making payment.
- We undertook very limited action to recover unpaid debts last year and no court action. This both recognised the impact of the crisis on businesses and the practical difficulties in enforcing payment due to the Covid restrictions.

Because of these factors it is impossible to make a meaningful year to year comparison in relation to business rates collection. To put this drop into context it is a comparable drop to both local and national rates. For example, our neighbouring authority Sedgemoor reported a 4.04% drop. 75% of losses below budget expectations will be met by Central Government via an additional Covid19 Grant.

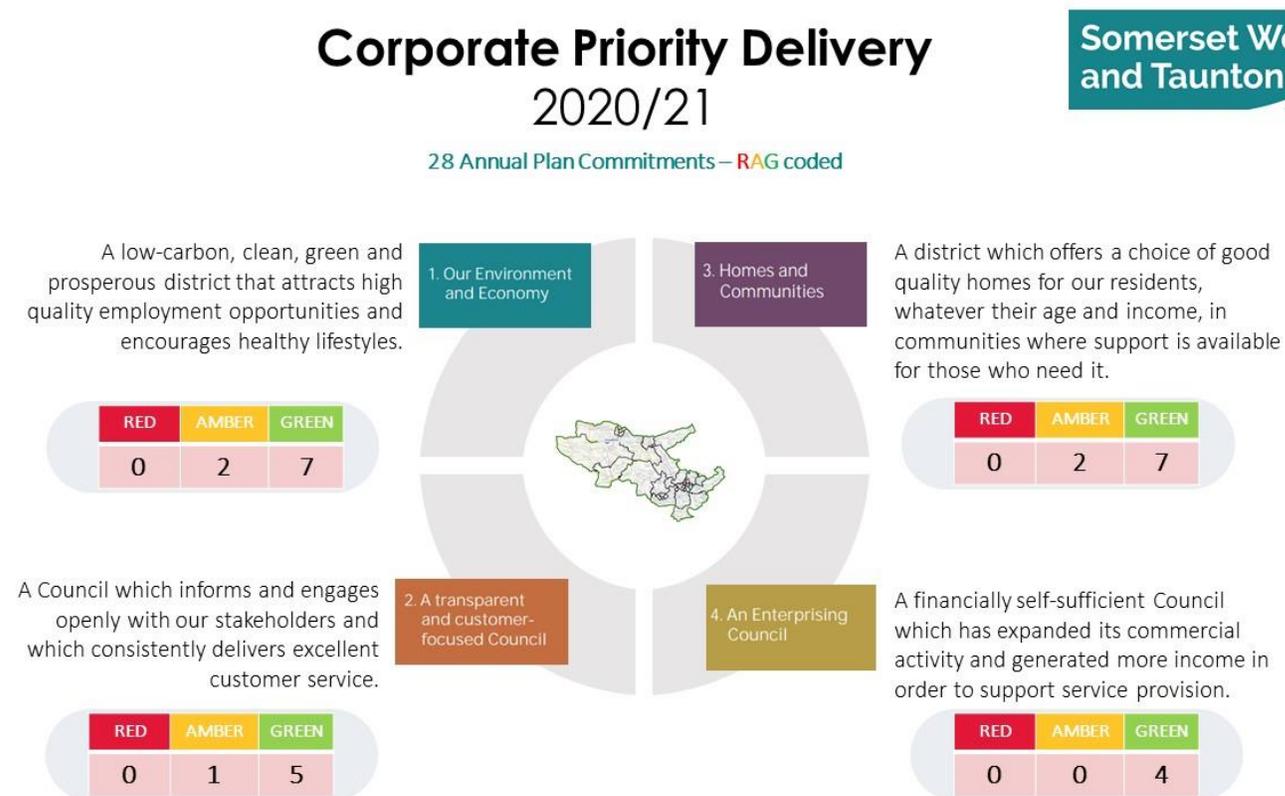
Our residents have done really well this year to maintain their payments of Council Tax despite the difficulties of the past year. We achieved a collection rate of 96.78%, which is only 0.22% below target. This is actually a very positive result given the circumstances of the past 12 months and hopefully is reflective of broader resilience within our local economy. It should be noted that unlike Business Rates the Council Tax net collectable debit rose from 99m to 102m. We have undertaken limited pre-court action (nudge letters and reminder notices), but this has been impacted by resourcing constraints resulting from the need to process business grants. We have a smaller drop compared to that of local and national rates. For example, our neighbouring authority Sedgemoor report a 1.09% drop. This reduction in income is shared with all major preceptors.

In conclusion we have quite consciously taken a more lenient approach to recovery activity this year to try and help both Business Rate and Council Taxpayers

experiencing difficulty (many for the first time) through the economic impact of the crisis. The management team meet regularly to map out a catch-up programme and make sure customers in difficulty are given support and collection rates return to normal levels as soon as possible.

### 4.3 Progress update for 2020/21 Annual Plan

The Annual Plan contains 28 specific commitments that we said we will deliver in 2020/21. The graphic below provides a summary of progress as at the end of March 2021 for each of these commitments, split by the 4 themes of the Corporate Strategy. Each commitment has been rated as either Red, Amber or Green to indicate progress made.



In total, 23 of the 28 commitments are rated as Green, meaning that progress was as anticipated at the start of the financial year. There are 5 commitments which are rated as Amber, meaning that there was some slippage. This is generally linked to the impact of Covid 19 and will mean that final delivery of the initiative will roll forward to the 2021/22 year. 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. 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 31<sup>st</sup> March there were 4 Key Business Risks (with a score of 15 or higher) on the risk register.

### Key Business Risks:

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.	5	4	20	Alison North
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	Decision awaited regarding unitary proposals. Maintaining operational delivery during period of significant change.	4	4	16	James Hassett

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March the Corporate Issues Log contained 3 Issues that had a red RAG status.

**Red rated Issues from the Corporate Issues Log:**

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
CI 20	Internal Ops	Health and safety compliance especially with regard to working from height.	R	Sean Papworth

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 the Annual Plan 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.

