

Somerset West and Taunton Council Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 2nd March 2022

Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 3 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 9 months of the 2021/22 financial year (1st April 2021 – 31st December 2021). The report includes information for a range of key performance indicators and includes the key business risks for the council.

Given the breadth of information contained in the report, it is unlikely that all questions can be answered at the meeting. It would be helpful if any detailed questions could be submitted in advance.

2. Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee and Executive are asked to note the Council's performance report for quarter 3.

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:

- The position in respect of our key performance indicators at the end of quarter 3 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.

Progress updates for the actions to deliver the Council's Annual Plan was included at the end of Q2, and as these are reported every 6 months, the next update will be for the end of March in the out-turn report.

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. Progress against these is reported every 6 months, and the next update will be for the end of March.

Progress against a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) is reported quarterly. These KPI's are used to monitor progress in delivering key services and to enable us to quickly identify and rectify any problem areas. These indicators are linked to one of the four corporate priorities to indicate how they support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy.

The table in Appendix 1 includes the councils Key Performance Indicators and shows how the council has performed for the first 9 months 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 2.

For the majority of indicators, the target has either been met or, in many cases, has been exceeded. Overall, there are 5 'Red' and 2 '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 9 months of this year is 78%, which is below the target of 90%.

The reasons for this are varied and are summarised below:

- *Increased numbers of complaints* - the number of complaints received continue to be significantly higher than in the previous financial years. Higher volumes of complaints present challenges in some areas in being able to respond within the target time.
- *Complexity* - we are continuing to receive a greater number of more complex complaints. These take longer to investigate and respond to and often cannot be responded to within target. Where this is the case officers are under instruction to contact the complainant and agree a new realistic deadline for response.
- *Capacity* - the increased volumes and complexity are highlighting capacity problems in some areas around having enough sufficiently skilled officers to respond to complaints.
- *Customer expectations* - customer expectations are increasing resulting in a growth in the number of complaints being registered. This is a sector wide trend across local government. The Housing Ombudsman is reporting a 230% increase in the complaints reported for the period April to June 2021 from the same period in the previous year.
- *Local service-related issues* – we have recommenced normal recovery and enforcement activity in respect of Council Tax, Business Rates and Miscellaneous Income debts. In addition, we have recently launched a project to target a backlog of previous year Council Tax and Business Rate debts. There were also problems

with waste collection in the earlier part of the financial year. All of this has acted to increase complaints.

We are actively taking steps to improve our performance on response times, and these remain significantly better than in the previous financial year. These steps include:

- Refining and re-writing elements of the IT software (Firmstep) that manages the complaints process to make the routing of complaints easier. These changes are currently being tested and will be rolled out shortly.
- Training is being delivered across the organisation to both build capacity and improve the quality of responses to complaints.
- Over 70 staff within the Housing Directorate have received specific complaints training from the Housing Quality Network which has focussed on improving the quality of responses. In addition, all Housing staff have completed refresher customer care training to ensure customers are treated with fairness and respect.
- A complaints dashboard is being developed to improve the quality of feedback and trend analysis for individual areas.
- Learning from complaints and complaint trends are driving new work. In Housing, for example, a working group is looking at damp and mould issues, and deep dive activity is being undertaken with other authorities to compare performance and share good practice.
- Our complaints lead continues to work closely with services to resolve issues and to ensure we can issue responses as quickly as possible. Localised reporting in some directorates has also started in detail, for example weekly follow up on cases within Housing.

We are actively monitoring the workload in this area together with response times and implementing improvements. However, we are conscious that demand will continue to grow particularly in view of the anticipated impact of the fuel price increase and inflation all of which will continue to make this a challenging target.

Average call wait times:

Detailed commentary is included in Appendix 2.

Forecast budget variance for General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

Detailed commentary for these 2 indicators is included in the separate Budget Monitoring Reports.

Average re-let times.

The average re-let time for council properties over the past quarter was 54.9 days, which exceeded our target of 44 days. While performance for October and November was above the target, for December both Minor and Major voids have shown a reduction in turnaround times.

This is a particularly challenging time for void management and all Housing Providers across Somerset 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; Refocussing trades staff to clear repairs backlogs built up during the pandemic; 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 progressing against our 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.

The target of 44 days was set in December 2020 for the current financial year and was based on Quarter 2 Housemark metrics that showed a median performance of 44.5 days for District Councils that held housing stock at that time. Since then, Housemark data showed that the District Council average void turnaround time had increased to 49.8 days by Quarter 4 of 2020/21 (and no doubt has continued to further increase this year). Reasons for this increase across the sector have been described above.

The Housing Management team also reviews wider performance indicators to give a rounded view of performance with respect to letting of properties. The Pulse statistical data for September 2021 places us in the top quartile for the indicators "Proportion of dwellings vacant, but available to let", and only marginally outside of top quartile performance for 'Proportion of social homes let', so our performance overall does give us some confidence that although improvement is required, we are not significantly out of step with other Housing Providers.

Percentage of communal areas with a Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) in place and FRA Review complete (where applicable)

The target is to complete 100% of Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) in place and FRA Review complete (where applicable). One FRA Review was completed late in the 3rd quarter, although no concerns were found once this was undertaken. All FRAs and Reviews are up-to-date at the point of writing this report.

Completion of emergency housing repairs in 24 hours.

The target is to complete 100% of emergency repairs within 24 hours. Over the past 3 months 100% of emergency repairs have been completed within 24 hours. The

performance of 99.9% for the year so far is due to one emergency repair in the previous quarter that took 15 minutes longer to complete than the 24 hour target.

Contextual information for the indicator: Income collected as a percentage of rent owed.

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. In Quarter 2 the performance was slightly over 100% because tenants had paid more than was 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 2021, 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 the risk register or issues log 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. The Risk Scoring Matrix used to score the risks is attached at Appendix 3. 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 December there were 5 Key Business Risks (with a score of 15 or higher) on the risk register which are shown in Appendix 4.

As of the end of December the Corporate Issues Log contained 3 Issues which are shown in Appendix 5.

Appendices 4 and 5 provide a summary of the key risk or issue together with the current status of the development and delivery of any mitigation plans required to address them.

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 position is available in a separate budget monitoring 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	Key Performance Indicators Report
Appendix 2	Update on Average Call Wait Times
Appendix 3	Risk Scoring Matrix
Appendix 4	Corporate Risk Register – Key Business Risks
Appendix 5	Corporate Issues

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