

2017/18 ANNUAL REPORT



Co-operative Councils
Innovation Network

Stevenage
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Another successful year for Stevenage



Sharon Taylor, Leader - Stevenage Borough Council

Welcome to our 2017/18 Annual Report which tells you about our successes during the past year and sets out our commitments to local residents for the next twelve months.

This year saw us take a major step forward in realising our ambitions for Stevenage, with the unveiling of plans for large scale regeneration in the town centre that will bring in new shops, homes, work and leisure facilities and give our local economy a real boost.

In the face of financial challenge, we continue to deliver high quality services through the hard work of councillors, staff, partners and volunteers and by engaging with Stevenage people to make sure we focus on their priorities.

During 2017/18, we provided more new homes for local families, improved public squares in the town and worked with local residents to create better, brighter neighbourhood spaces. All these projects are part of wider schemes that will continue over the course of next year and beyond.

I hope you enjoy reading about these and other activities in this report and that you will join me in looking forward to another exciting year ahead.



Scott Crudgington, Chief Executive - Stevenage Borough Council

I would like to thank our residents for the valuable feedback we received throughout the year, which helps to shape the future of our council and the range of services we provide.

Through our town-wide resident survey, people told us that they wanted a modern town centre, quality housing, well-maintained public spaces and safe neighbourhoods.

I was pleased to see that these priorities closely match our aspirations for the town. Many of the achievements in this year's report demonstrate the real progress we are making in delivering our Future Town Future Council programme, which will help to realise these aspirations.

I take a lot of pride in our council staff who are out there every day working for the town - the report highlights just some of their many successes during the year.

I am confident that together we can build on our achievements and will see further improvements throughout the coming year.



Future Town Future Council

Future Town Future Council is delivering key improvements that our residents told us they want to see.

Included in this five year programme are plans to regenerate the town centre, provide housing that works for all, make services more accessible, and invest in our town's neighbourhoods.

To help us deliver our promises, we are continually reviewing how we can work differently to deliver better value for money, remain an attractive employer and ensure our services are the best they can be.

Co-operative Council



We are passionate about our local communities and they are passionate about Stevenage. Together we can both play our part and continue to provide excellent services and deliver the necessary change to improve people's lives and make Stevenage a great place to live, work and visit for years to come. Community engagement and empowerment is part of Stevenage's story and is vital for us to meet our mutual goals.

Co-operation has become an embedded principle in the way the council works with partners and

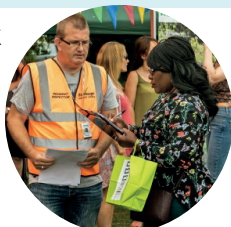
the people of Stevenage. We are keen to include genuine input from our communities and partners in the services we deliver and we want to continue to support services that are led by them.

Stevenage Borough Council has already begun picking up the pace with our ground-breaking Co-operative Neighbourhood Management (CNM) programme. As this is more widely rolled out, hundreds of residents will be involved in shaping, designing and helping to deliver improvements they want to see in their local areas.

"The community came forward with an idea and we listened"

Here are just a few examples of how we have worked co-operatively this year:

We have delivered over £500k investment in neighbourhood improvements with local residents through our Cooperative Neighbourhood Management programme.



We have worked closely with the health sector and other local organisations to develop the Healthy Stevenage Strategy.



We worked with teachers and pupils of Peartree Spring Primary School to clean-up an alleyway that is a popular route to the school for the children and their families. We have helped to make further improvements as well as giving responsibility to the school to further the impressive work through their own volunteering network.



Together with our partners we have launched our town centre regeneration with developer Mace and are developing a local employment programme with the involvement of young people.



We launched our cultural strategy – Stevenage Re-imagined in partnership with the Arts Council England and local cultural organisations.

£45million was awarded for the major refurbishment contract for the council's housing stock with an associated social investment programme.



Regenerating our Town



Regenerating the town remains your top priority with **45%** of you putting it in your top 3 in our recent resident survey.

This year we have unveiled exciting plans that mark the start of the **£1bn** regeneration of Stevenage town centre.

Developer Mace has been appointed to lead the way in the first stage of our ambitious programme – known as ‘SG1’.

Mace’s impressive scheme brings **£350m** of private investment into the town.



It will see the development of new shops, homes and restaurants, a new park and a central venue for library, health and council services in the heart of the town.

Ahead of this major regeneration we have revitalised **2** public squares with new trees, granite seating and feature lighting. Further plans to improve Market Place and wayfinding signs around the town have also been drawn up.



Our new cultural strategy sets out a 10 year vision for Arts and Heritage in Stevenage and includes plans to revitalise the theatre and museum offer in the town centre.

12 events have helped to attract people into the town centre – ranging from summer holiday play activities to Christmas celebrations and from specialist markets to the movie weekend.



As part of our Future Town Future Council programme, in 2018/19 we will:

- Begin the first phase of the Town Centre regeneration, working with Mace to develop and consult on plans for SG1
- Open a visitors centre to showcase our history as well as our ambitious future
- Complete improvements to Market Place and wayfinding as well as develop plans for the Town Square
- Work with partners to further develop cultural events, exhibitions and art installations as part of our cultural strategy

Town
centre
regeneration

Building New Homes



Housing continues to be a main focus for you with **32%** in our resident survey saying it is important to have a range of housing, including affordable homes.

We have been progressing well with the adoption of a new Local Plan.

A successful Public Examination of the plan was held, and the independent Planning Inspector gave a positive report after listening to the views of residents and businesses.

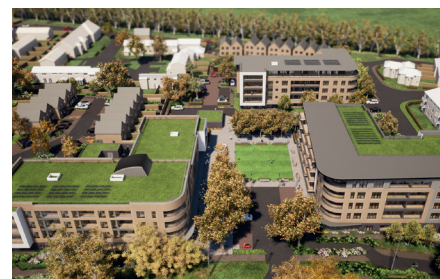
We are now working with the Government to get the plan adopted.



Figures published last summer showed a massive **690** homes of all types were completed in Stevenage the previous year – well above our annual target.

Our ambitious plans to build more council homes to provide much needed affordable homes for local people continue.

34 council homes have been developed this year, bringing the total number since 2014 up to **131**. These included new homes at the Archer Road and Vincent Court schemes.



Other schemes under construction at present are at the former March Hare and Twin Foxes pub sites and at Ferrier Road. Together these will deliver **44** new homes.

We are working co-operatively with Chase Homes and Metropolitan Housing Association on the old Dupont site where over **200** homes are being developed. We will have access to **34** homes to let at social rents.

Stevenage has been awarded **£900,000** of infrastructure funding from the Government which means we can press ahead with our plans for new housing development at Kenilworth Close.

32%
Want a
range of
housing

690
Housing
completions
confirmed

131
New council
homes since
2014

34
Homes with
Housing
Associations

£900k
External
funding to
support new
schemes

As part of our Future Town Future Council programme, in 2018/19 we will:

- Complete and let 54 new council homes
- Start work on a further 267 new council homes across a range of planned schemes
- Consult with the public on plans for the Kenilworth Close site, to inform a planning application for the development, which will include a flagship older persons housing scheme
- Look at other potential areas of council development across the town.

Housing
development
delivery

Managing and Improving our Homes

Over **1100** tenants and leaseholders responded to our recent satisfaction survey – they told us we should focus on repairs and maintenance services, the quality of their homes and providing value for money for their rent and service charges.

In our 'Big Knock' event, our housing staff also visited over **350** tenants to get to know them better and to find out what they want from the housing service. The same topics came up as well as improved communications and on-line services.

The Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) continued to give their opinions on key areas of the housing service such as the council's financial plans, the flat block

major works programme and service reviews.

The group strengthened its membership this year, with **2** new customer members coming on board.

We celebrated one of our council tenants winning a nationally recognised **housing community champion award**.

We collected **98.9%** of rent and over **97%** of leasehold service charges last year. This allows us to invest in our homes and make our housing service better for you.

Our Repairs team carried out more than **20,400** repairs in 2017/18 and we invested **£12.2m** to improve our council homes.

We brought **660** homes up to a decent standard. We replaced **420** roofs, **649** windows, **696** doors, **203** boilers and carried out a range of internal works.

93% of tenants who responded to our survey were satisfied with these improvements.

We continue to support our housing customers who need our assistance most:

- **356** people took up tenancies in council homes
- We responded to over **7000** emergency alarm calls to Careline customers and supported housing schemes
- Our benefit and debt advisers supported **694** people
- We assisted **231** households to prevent them from becoming homeless

1500
people
engaged
with

Repairs
a top
priority for
tenants and
leaseholders

£12.2m
Improving
our council
homes

20,400
Repairs
undertaken

356
New tenants
in council
homes

As part of our Future Town Future Council programme, in 2018/19 we will:

- Develop a better understanding of our customers' views and requirements so we can provide more tailored housing services
- Improve the way we work and use technology to benefit our housing customers
- Begin work on our flat block refurbishment programme
- Work with our partners to support customers as they move onto Universal Credit

Excellent
council
homes

Improving Stevenage Neighbourhoods



Our resident survey confirmed that clean streets and well maintained green spaces and parks are high on the agenda for many local people.

We've invested in improving public and green spaces and supported more residents to step up and be active in their community with projects such as community gardens and Green Space volunteers.

This year we have started in Shephall and Pin Green where we have seen keen interest in residents to get involved.



We have used local feedback and information to design our plans for 2018/19 when we will focus on St Nicholas and Martins Wood.

216 children took part in consultation to help design the significant improvements to six play areas across Pin Green, Shephall, St Nicholas and Martins Wood.

Residents and staff are being kept informed following the launch of the '**Our Neighbourhood**' webpage.

Our three Neighbourhood Wardens are the council's eyes and ears to tackle issues at a local



level. This year the team have dealt with a combined total of **485** environmental complaints reported through Fix my Street.

Green Space volunteers have contributed around **1500** hours of their time and, through one of their projects, recorded over **20** species of butterflies in the meadow managed grasslands across the town.

180 Litterbins have been replaced with new styles to deter fly-tipping and dog fouling.

Our refuse and recycling team collected **30,000 tonnes** of waste from **37,160** households.

1500
Hours
contributed by
Green Space
volunteers

£500k
on
neighbourhood
investment

180
Litterbins
replaced

Our
Neighbourhood
webpage
launched

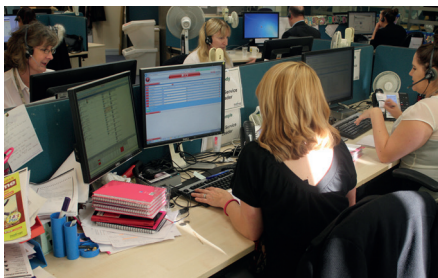
216
children
consulted

As part of our Future Town Future Council programme, in 2018/19 we will:

- Deliver neighbourhood improvements with local communities in St Nicholas and Martins Wood
- Support more resident-led activity through our Community Development team
- Begin work to improve our garage blocks

Co-operative
neighbourhood
management

Connecting to our Customers



Satisfaction with our Customer Services Centre (CSC) remains high with **89%** of our customers giving it a 'good' rating.

We answered **192,878** calls and there were nearly **30,000** visits to the centre last year.

Customer feedback is important to us as it helps us understand where we can improve our services. We were quicker to respond to your complaints last year, with **94.4%** being closed within our target date, up by **4%** compared to 2016/17.



You can now carry out more transactions online – for example, report fly-tipping, pay council tax and apply for benefits.

115,000 transactions were made online this year and we expect this to increase. We know from our resident survey that **39%** of you think the best way for us to save money is by doing even more online. We have started to develop a new website which will make it easier for you to use our services online and contact us on a mobile phone.

33% of you told us you like to be kept informed through our website,



whilst **29%** view our social media as the best way to find out about what the council is doing.

We have over **7000** followers on Twitter, **4000** on Facebook and our new Instagram page already has over **300** followers.

Our communications team issued **70** press releases and responded to a total of **174** media enquiries last year.

With the introduction of new data protection laws, we have been reviewing how we look after your data to make sure the information we hold is safe and secure.

89%
Satisfaction
with CSC

193k
Calls
answered

115,000
Online
transactions

11k
Followers on
social media

94.4%
Complaints
closed on
time

As part of our Future Town Future Council programme, in 2018/19 we will:

- Launch a new customer strategy that sets out our ambitious plans to improve customer service and promises to deliver consistent service standards
- Improve our online offer by delivering a simple, clearer website and straightforward online self-service options for key council services
- Involve customers and staff in designing and testing new products and services before we launch them
- Make sure our customer service centre is geared up to meet customer demand and is easy to use, especially for people who need it the most

Connected
to our
customers

Community and Safety



Reducing crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is in your top 3 priorities according to our resident survey.

Our community safety partnership, SoSafe, have worked very hard to tackle these issues.

There has been a **3% decrease** in criminal damage and ASB compared to last year.

Almost **9 in 10** of residents feel safe when outside in their local area during the day, and more than half of residents say that they feel very or fairly safe when outside in their local area after dark – an increase of **5%** compared to 2 years ago.

We have supported **97** victims/survivors of domestic abuse through Stevenage Against



Domestic Abuse (SADA). The SADA Forum won the **TPAS Excellence in the Community Action Award** in the southern region.

We have been recognised by Hertfordshire's Safeguarding Adults Board as having **strong arrangements** in place for **safeguarding adults** in Stevenage.

We had more than **800** face-to-face conversations with older and vulnerable people, advising and reassuring them about scams, personal safety, and reporting crime.

We secured **£9k** funding to tackle 'enviro-crime' hotspots - **27** fixed penalty notices were served for fly-tipping and **43** abandoned vehicles were removed.



We held our first hate crime conference, bringing together local organisations who discussed ways to tackle hate crime and to empower victims, focusing on incidents against people with disabilities, transgender people and the faith community.

We supported **9** community centres through the further development of the Stevenage Community Association Network (SCAN).

We held **11** community events - a family fun day in the town centre gardens, bat walks, a teddy bears' picnic and music in the park are just a few of the activities enjoyed by local residents this year.

3%
Decrease in
ASB

5%
Increase in
people feeling
safe

97
Domestic
Abuse victims
supported

£9k
Secured to
tackle
fly-tipping

11
Community
events held

In 2018/19 we will:

- Work with our partners to deliver our new Community Safety Strategy
- Improve the way we manage enforcement work around the environment and anti-social behaviour
- Continue to work with police and partner agencies to protect the most vulnerable in our town

Healthy Living, Leisure and Play



We held a health summit attended by **80** local organisations who helped shape our **Healthy Stevenage Strategy**.

The SoActive project helped over **400** residents to find ways to live healthier active lifestyles.

3,736 people accessed services provided by the **Healthy Hub**.

We maintained **3** Green Flag awards for our Fairlands Valley Park, Hampson Park and Town Centre Garden open spaces.



We celebrated **50 years** of play in Stevenage with a number of events across our play centres including:

- A flash mob in the town centre involving play workers and more than 34 children from Dance-Beat.
- Past and present play workers celebration event
- Pavement art event on the Joy Ride in the Town Centre

The Play Champions were shortlisted for the Local Government Chronicle awards 'Team of the Year'.

Our play centres opened for **1087** sessions and had **20,281** attendees.



Lots of leisure events and activities took place this year:

- **20,000** watched our fireworks in November
- **2000** people came to see our Christmas lights being switched on
- **893,000** attendances at our leisure centres
- **223,000** visits to our swimming centre
- **15,000** people attended the Pearl Izumi Tour Series and **240,000** watched the highlights on TV
- **30,000** people enjoyed Stevenage Day
- **140,000** theatre visits
- **18,187** people visited our museum

400
Residents
helped to be
healthier

Healthy
Stevenage
Strategy
launched

50
Years
of play
celebrated

30,000
Attended
Stevenage
Day

3
Green flag
awards

In 2018/19 we will:

- Deliver our Healthy Stevenage Strategy with health and community partners
- Develop plans for future leisure and cultural facilities for our town

Delivering Excellence



We still maintained a **balanced budget** despite further cuts from Central Government.

We know there will be tough times ahead but we are **committed to protecting our front line services**.

Our Council Tax collection rate this year was **96.4%** which exceeded our target.

21,810 housing benefit new claims and 'changes in circumstances' were processed, taking on average **7.16** days per application. This is the best result since 2009/10.



We recruited **5** new apprentices and **2** new graduates. We also have a further **6** staff members accessing the apprenticeship levy to support the development of their skills

Along with over **700** organisations nationwide we signed up to Mind's 'Time to Change' pledge to **end mental health stigma**. We complemented this with staff training, sessions and support on mental health issues.

We continue to **improve our computer systems** to support the delivery of our ambitious digital plans.



Partnership working is crucial to everything we do here in Stevenage. We currently share some of our services with key partners across Hertfordshire and established a new **shared legal service**. We continue to look for more opportunities to work better together.

In partnership with Stevenage CAB and our children's centres, we successfully provided **financial advice and budgeting guidance** to our families most in need.

Over the next year we will carry on working closely with you and our partners to deliver the exciting and ambitious plans for our town.

Balanced budget

96.4% Council Tax collection

5 New apprentices

Mental health pledge signed

As part of our Future Town Future Council programme, in 2018/19 we will:

- Look at how we can make our services more efficient so we are less reliant on funding
- Enable new ways of working and develop staff skills to equip us for the future
- Continue to work closely with our partners to make Stevenage a better place to live, work and play
- Understand our services better to make sure we are always working in the most efficient and effective way for our customers