

# Deputy Leader: Housing and Homelessness Portfolio Statement 2018/19



## **INTRODUCTION**

East Staffordshire Borough Council has three Corporate Priorities:

- **Value For Money Council Services:**  
*Protecting your money*
- **Promoting Local Economic Growth:**  
*To benefit local people by turning aspiration into reality*
- **Protecting and Strengthening Communities:**  
*Love where you live*

The following statement sets out how the Deputy Leader for Housing and Homelessness and officers within this portfolio area will contribute to achieving these priorities, as well highlighting key achievements from 2017/18

However the activities outlined in the statement are often cross-cutting themes with overlaps into other areas, and throughout the statement there may be examples of joint delivery with other Executive Members as well as managers from other sections.

Each of the statements made by the individual portfolio holders will then be collated to form the basis of East Staffordshire Borough Council's Corporate Plan for 2018/19.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2017/18**

Over the past 12 months, the Council has been working hard to improve its services and is currently on track to achieve around 95% of this portfolio's milestones set for 2017/18 by the end of this financial year.

Some of these achievements are highlighted in the following section.

### ***New Obligations Created by the Homelessness Reduction Bill***

The Homelessness Reduction Bill introduced by Government recently created a host of additional duties for all local authorities, particularly with how councils provide temporary accommodation. The Council has worked to address this issue by putting in place new arrangements ensuring it is legally compliant.

### ***Maintained Commissioning Approach with Third Sector Partners***

The Council has continued to work on its Rough Sleepers Outreach Service in partnership with the YMCA, to offer support to any rough sleepers in the Borough. This year the Council ensured that the service was delivered to a high standard. In addition, the Council continued to monitor its performance in dealing with people who become homeless and need Council support. The Council has also maintained its commissioning approach with third sector partners. This has included procuring specialised training for staff, and support for residents in completing online claims for Universal credit and personal budgeting advice.

### ***Tackle Empty Homes***

Using Section 106 monies, in line with the approved programme of works, the Council designed a matrix to inform the decision of selecting properties. A business plan was identified and produced, detailing the first year of the empty homes programme.

### ***“Jam Jar” Business Plan***

To continue supporting vulnerable people in managing their finances to minimise the risk of being evicted through non-payment of rent, the Council investigated methods of helping the more vulnerable tenants in managing their finances to ensure they prioritise rent and food.

### ***Revenues, Benefits and Customer Contacts***

The Council has continued to maximise income through effective collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates, and reducing former years' arrears. It has continued to monitor and, where appropriate, improve service and access arrangements within its Customer Service Centres. The Council has also continued with the multi-disciplinary team approach to enable seamless switching between front office and back office roles within Revenues, Benefits and Customer Contacts. It has also worked in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and other Staffordshire districts to look at ways of improving revenues and benefits services.

There has been significant policy activity, and during the year there was a review of the Council Tax Support Scheme and a review of the Recovery and Write-Off Policies. The Council has also continued to prepare for further development, roll-out and impact of the Government's Universal Credit benefit.

## **OBJECTIVES FOR 2018/19**

The Council is determined to continue to build on its successes during 2017/18 as it moves forward into the 2018/19 financial year. It will continue to improve performance, service delivery and value for money through delivery of the Council's three Corporate Priorities. Achievement of these priorities will be supported by the new wider Housing and Homelessness portfolio through delivery of the objectives detailed in the following section. The specific performance indicators identified to measure these objectives are referenced in the paragraphs below.

### ***Deliver Excellent SMARTER Services (Targets HH01; HH02; HH03; HH04; HH05; HH06)***

The Council will continue to maximise its ICT investments in the Revenues, Benefits and Customer Contacts team to deliver excellent services to the residents of East Staffordshire, maximising income through collection rates, minimising and reducing former years' arrears and further improvements to the collection of overpaid Housing Benefit. The Council will investigate the benefits of automating the housing benefits assessment process, which could fundamentally change the way it looks at benefits processing. The Council will also introduce a new automated card payment system which will enable it to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our Customer Service Centre staff. The Council will continue to monitor and, where appropriate, improve its services. This year it will realise the savings and benefits from the new hybrid mail contract and ensure the Council maintains its excellent Customer Service provision.

### ***Proactively Meet the Welfare Reform Challenges (Targets HH07; HH08; HH09)***

Despite the delay in the current planned roll-out of Universal Credit by the Department for Work and Pensions within East Staffordshire, the Council will continue to make preparations with a detailed training and implementation plan, and will ensure that all necessary stakeholders are actively engaged in the

process through a series of regular informative briefings. This will also include holding a Member briefing regarding Universal Credit. The Council will review both its Discretionary Housing Payments Policy and its Council Tax Reduction Discretionary Payment Policy. The Council will also be again reviewing the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

***Future-Proofing the Customer Service Centre (Targets HH10; HH11; HH12)***

The Council needs to ensure that the Customer Service Centre (CSC) in Burton meets the needs of its visitors and users. Whilst the Council continues to promote digital interaction and communication, the impacts from the Homelessness Reduction Act and Welfare Reforms mean that the current arrangements for face to face meetings with service users have changed. The CSC requires more dedicated private meeting rooms whilst also locating its multi-skilled staff in a truly agile environment so that they can be either dealing with queries on the telephone, carrying out back-office processing or responding to residents in a face to face environment. There will be planned alterations and enhancements within the CSC in order to facilitate this, and ensure that it remains fit for purpose for the next five to ten years.

***Maintain Commissioning Approach with Third Sector Partners (Target HH13; HH14)***

The Council will maintain its commissioning approach with local organisations from the third sector. This will include continuing to work proactively in partnership with the YMCA on the Rough Sleepers Outreach Service, to offer support to any rough sleepers in the Borough. It will also organise a rough sleeper count (to Government standards) in the winter to ensure the Council has an accurate picture of its rough sleeper situation.

In addition to this the Council will look at opportunities to commission support through local third sector organisations, for example the training of Council staff on key issues, as well as utilising Citizens Advice for providing assistance to anyone wishing to make an online claim for Universal Credit and for providing personal budgeting support.

***Delivering Better Services to Support Homelessness (Targets HH15; HH16; HH17)***

The Council will introduce the new demands placed on the service through the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). This will include proactive homelessness prevention work and ensuring that every applicant that is accepted for a new homeless duty receives a personal housing plan, and link where appropriate into our Jam Jar Account initiative. The Council will also ensure that it revises its Joint Allocations Policy with Trent & Dove to take account of the new legislation. Building on the changes the Council plans to introduce as a result of the HRA, it will also refresh and approve its new Homelessness Strategy.

## MEASURES AND TARGETS FOR 2018/19

The Housing and Homelessness portfolio has identified a number of measures and targets for 2018/19 which will contribute to the delivery of the objectives detailed above. These are set out in the following tables.

### Value for Money Council Services

Ref	Measures	Target 2018/19
HH01	Continue to Improve the Ways We Provide Benefits to Those Most in Need:  Time Taken to Process Benefit New Claims and Change Events (Previously NI 181)	8 Days
HH02	Continuing to Improve Customer Access to Services	99% of CSC and Telephony Team Enquiries Resolved at First Point of Contact
HH03	Continuing to Improve Customer Access to Services	Minimum 75% Telephony Team Calls Answered Within 10 Seconds
HH04	Working Towards the Reduction of Claimant Error Housing Benefit Overpayments (HBOPs):  % of HBOPs Overpayments Recovered During the Year;  % of HBOPS Processed and on Payment Arrangement	% of HBOPs Overpayments Recovered During the Year;  % of HBOPS Processed and on Payment Arrangement;  <i>To Be Agreed Post Outturn</i>
HH05	Continue to Maximise Income Through Effective Collection Processes  (Previously BV 9 & 10)	Collection Rates of -  Council Tax : 98%  NNDR : 99%



Ref	Measures	Target 2018/19
HH06	<p>Continue to Maximise Income Through Effective Collection Processes:</p> <p>Reduce Former Years Arrears for Council Tax; NNDR; Sundry Debts</p>	<p>Former Years Arrears for:</p> <p>Council Tax; NNDR; Sundry Debts;</p> <p><i>To Be Agreed Post Outturn</i></p>
HH07	<p>Prepare for Universal Credit Full Service Implementation</p>	<p>Hold 2 Stakeholder Meetings and 1 Member Briefing</p> <p>(March 2019)</p>
HH08	<p>Review Council Tax Support Scheme</p>	<p>Carry Out Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme</p> <p>(September 2018)</p>
HH09	<p>Review the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy and the Council Tax Reduction Discretionary Payments Policy</p>	<p>Carry Out a Review of the Council's Discretionary Payment Policies</p> <p>(April 2018)</p>
HH10	<p>Investigate Automation of the Assessment Benefit Claims and Changes of Circumstances</p>	<p>Carry Out Pilot Study to Investigate Automation of the Assessment Benefit Claims and Changes of Circumstances</p> <p>(September 2018)</p>
HH11	<p>Continuing to Improve Customer Access to Services</p>	<p>Introduce Payment Kiosk at Burton Customer Service Centre</p> <p>(June 2018)</p>
HH12	<p>Continuing to Improve Customer Access to Services</p>	<p>Plan for Amendments and Alterations to Customer Service Centre Complete</p> <p>(August 2018)</p>
HH13	<p>Maintain Commissioning Approach with Third Sector Partners</p>	<p>Procurement of at Least 2 Contract Opportunities via Third Sector Organisations</p> <p>(March 2019)</p>

## Protecting and Strengthening Communities

Ref	Measures	Target 2018/19
HH14	Tackle Rough Sleeping and Supporting Homeless Residents	Rough Sleeper Count Completed  (December 2018)
HH15	Delivering Better Services to Support Homelessness	100% Of Applicants Accepted for a New Homeless Duty Receiving a Personal Housing Plan
HH16	Delivering Better Services to Support Homelessness	Revise Joint Allocations Policy  (December 2018)
HH17	Delivering Better Services to Support Homelessness	Approve Refreshed Homelessness Strategy  (September 2018)