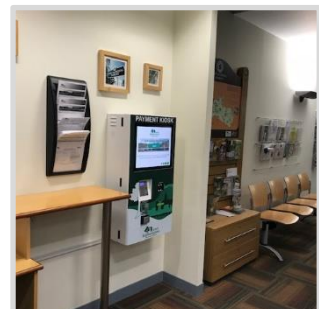


# Housing and Homelessness Deputy Leader's Statement 2019/20



## **INTRODUCTION**

East Staffordshire Borough Council has three Corporate Priorities:

- **Value for Money Council**
- **Community Regeneration**
- **Environment and Health & Wellbeing**

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 2018/19.

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 2019/20.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2018/19**

Over the past 12 months, the Council has been working hard to improve its services and is currently on track to achieve **93.75%** of this portfolio's milestones set for 2018/19 by the end of this financial year.

Some of these achievements are highlighted in the following section.

### ***Continued to Deliver Excellent SMARTER Services***

The Council has continued 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 is now utilising Direct Earnings Attachments to collect outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments which is improving the collection of current and previous years' outstanding amounts.

The Council has also introduced a new automated card payment system, further improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our Customer Service Centre staff. The Council has continued to improve its services, and this year realised the savings and benefits from the new hybrid mail contract whilst maintaining excellent Customer Service provision.

### ***Proactively met the Welfare Reform Challenges***

Despite the delay in the roll-out of Universal Credit by the Department for Work and Pensions within East Staffordshire, the Council continued to make preparations with a detailed training and implementation plan, ensuring that all necessary stakeholders have been actively engaged in the process through a series of regular informative briefings. This included holding a Member briefing regarding Universal Credit.

The Council also carried out reviews of its Discretionary Housing Payments Policy, Council Tax Reduction Discretionary Payment Policy and Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

### ***Future-Proofed the Customer Service Centre***

The Customer Service Centre in Burton underwent essential refurbishment work to future-proof it in advance of an expected change in demand as a result of the Homelessness Reduction Act and Universal Credit Full Service. More dedicated private meeting rooms have been created to provide both a private and comfortable experience for our visitors and a safe and secure working environment for our officers. The works also included the installation of a new Payment Kiosk, where visitors can pay their Council bills without having to wait for their payment to be taken. This has created a truly agile environment for our multi-skilled staff 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.

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

The Council has maintained its commissioning approach with local organisations from the third sector. This has included 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. The Council organised a rough sleeper count in November (to Government standards) to ensure the Council and MHCLG has an accurate picture of its rough sleeper situation. External recognition was given regarding the Council's Health and Safety Briefing and Volunteer Materials which were cited and taken as 'good practice' by Homeless Link to be used with other Councils.

The Council also approved a £20,000 grant to the YMCA to assist in the provision of a winter night shelter for rough sleepers which has provided a welcoming and accessible environment for rough sleepers during the cold and dark winter months, whilst also giving the Council and other outreach groups an opportunity to engage with rough sleepers, with a view to securing suitable long term accommodation.

In addition to this the Council has looked 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.

***Delivered Better Services to Support Homelessness***

The Council has adapted to the significant new demands placed on the service through the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). This has required the recruitment of two additional officers to deliver proactive homelessness prevention work, and with upgrades to the IT database it has ensured that every applicant that is accepted for a new homeless duty receives a personal housing plan.

The Rough Sleeper Count was successfully undertaken in November 2018, without disruption, with the help of a team of committed staff and volunteers, and in December 2018 the Winter Night Shelter opened its doors once again.

The Council has also revised its Joint Allocations Policy with Trent & Dove to take account of the new legislation and approved a new Homelessness Strategy for 2018-2022.

## **OBJECTIVES FOR 2019/20**

The Council is determined to continue to build on its successes during 2018/19 as it moves forward into the 2019/20 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 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 HH1; HH2; HH3; HH4; HH5; HH6; HH8)***

We will continue to deliver excellent services to the residents of East Staffordshire, maximising income through collection rates, reducing former years' arrears, and continue to increase the collection of overpaid Housing Benefit. We will review the Business Rates Relief policy to provide some additional flexibility into how we administrate the policy when new reliefs are provided by the Government and we will also continue to grow our tax bases through a series of reviews of discounts, exemptions and reliefs.

### ***Proactively Meet the Welfare Reform Challenges (Targets HH7; HH9)***

We will once again review the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. We will proactively manage the impact of the partial introduction of Universal Credit within the Borough and continue to ensure that the processing at the Borough Council side is carried out as efficiently and swiftly as possible. We will also work proactively with external stakeholders to prepare for the Universal Credit Managed Migration in 2020.

### ***Deliver Better Services to Support Homelessness (Targets HH10, HH11, HH13; HH14)***

We will build on the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act, proactively improving our service through a series of initiatives such as maximising the utilisation of self-contained temporary accommodation for

homeless applicants and reducing the void turnaround to an average of six working days. We will also ensure that the average time from appointment to an initial decision for homeless applicants is 10 days.

We will also prepare and produce a business plan and commission additional professional assistance to tackle selected empty homes within the borough with the intent to bring them into use.

***Tackle Rough Sleeping (Target HH12)***

We will continue to work proactively and review our options for continuing outreach services to rough sleepers, ensuring that support is offered to any rough sleepers in the Borough. We will also organise our annual rough sleeper count (again to Government standards) in the winter to ensure we have an accurate and verified picture of our rough sleeper situation.

## MEASURES AND TARGETS FOR 2019/20

The Housing and Homelessness portfolio has identified a number of measures and targets for 2019/20 which will contribute to the delivery of the objectives detailed above. These are set out in the following tables.

### Value for Money Council

Ref	Measures	Target 2019/20
HH01	Continue to Maximise Income Through Effective Collection Processes (Previously BV 9 & 10)	Collection Rates of -  Council Tax : 98%  NNDR : 99%
HH02	Continue to Maximise Income Through Effective Collection Processes: Reduce Former Years Arrears for Council Tax; NNDR; Sundry Debts	Former Years Arrears for:  Council Tax; NNDR; Sundry Debts;  <i>To Be Agreed Post Outturn</i>
HH03	Maintaining excellent customer access to services with face-to-face and telephony enquiries	99% of CSC and Telephony Team Enquiries Resolved at First Point of Contact  Minimum 75% Telephony Team Calls Answered Within 10 Seconds
HH04	Maximise Tax Bases through continued reviews of discounts, exemptions and reliefs	<i>To Be Agreed Post Tender Award</i>
HH05	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)	<i>To Be Agreed Post Outturn</i>



Ref	Measures	Target 2019/20
HH06	<p><b>Working Towards the Reduction of Claimant Error Housing Benefit Overpayments (HBOPs):</b></p> <p>% of HBOPs Overpayments Recovered During the Year;</p> <p>% of HBOPS Processed and on Payment Arrangement</p>	<p>% of HBOPs Overpayments Recovered During the Year;</p> <p>% of HBOPS Processed and on Payment Arrangement;</p> <p><i>To Be Agreed Post Outturn</i></p>
HH07	<p><b>Review Council Tax Reduction scheme</b></p>	<p>Carry Out Review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme</p> <p>(December 2019)</p>
HH08	<p><b>Review Business Rates Rate Relief policy</b></p>	<p>Policy reviewed (for next year's implementation)</p> <p>(March 2020)</p>
HH09	<p><b>Prepare for Universal Credit Managed Migration</b></p>	<p>Work with DWP and partners, prepare 2 in year progress reports and 1 Member briefing</p> <p>(March 2020)</p>

### Environment and Health & Wellbeing

Ref	Measures	Target 2019/20
HH10	<p><b>Delivering Better Services to Support Homelessness</b></p>	<p>Average time from appointment to initial decision for homeless applicants of 10 days</p>
HH11	<p><b>Continue to Maximise Utilisation of Self Contained Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Applicants</b></p>	<p>Reduce 'Key to Key' Void Turnaround to an average of 6 working days</p>

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Target 2019/20</b>
HH12	Review options for continuing outreach services to Rough Sleepers	Report completed (July 2019)
HH13	Delivering Better Services to Support Homelessness	Launch Campaign to raise awareness of rough sleeping, street living and street begging  (June 2019)
HH14	Produce a Business Plan to tackle selected empty homes	Business Plan Produced (April 2019)