



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Committee

22nd September 2020

Report of: Councillor Kelham Cooke
The Leader of the Council



Covid-19 Recovery and Quarter One 2020/21 Performance

This paper details South Kesteven’s performance now the council has moved into the ‘Re-start’ phase of the Covid-19 pandemic recovery plan.

It also sets out performance reporting for quarter one of 2020/21. It shows the council’s performance data in dashboard format for the key service areas agreed with committee members.

Report Author

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Corporate Priority:	Decision type:	Wards:
Competitiveness	Administrative	All Wards

Reviewed by:	Elaine Pepper, Head of Organisational Development	25 August 2020
Approved by:	Lee Sirdifield, Strategic Director, Transformation and Change	7 September 2020
Signed off by:	Councillor Kelham Cooke, The Leader of the Council	13 September 2020

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s)

1. Note the content of the report outlining the progress of the activities in the ‘Re-start’ phase of the Covid-19 recovery plan.
2. Note quarter one performance results shown in dashboard format for the key services.

1 South Kesteven Recovery to Covid-19

1.1 On June 16th, Cabinet agreed a framework for setting out a recovery plan from the effects of Covid-19 that mirror that of the new corporate plan. The activities planned to be undertaken between June-September were to be proactive as opposed to the reactive response approach the council had to take at the start of the pandemic. Moving from the 'Response' into the 'Re-start' phase will primarily concentrate on the phased re-opening of operations (sports facilities, supporting wider businesses to re-open, arts activities). Key activities of the 'Re-start' phase have been grouped into five themes:

1. Deliver growth of our economy.
2. Housing that meets the needs of our residents.
3. Strong communities with high quality facilities.
4. A clean and sustainable environment; and
5. A high performing council.

The following information outlines South Kesteven performance against the themes of the recovery plan.

1.2 To deliver growth of our economy the council have committed to support businesses in our district during recovery of Covid-19. Significant progress has been made in this area, including:

- The council has been committed to re-opening our high streets safely with funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Resources have been allocated to provide safe re-openings for the towns of South Kesteven and work is continuing with local partner agencies during these challenging times. Greater communications and local safety adaptations will be applied to continually support local businesses who are gradually re-opening across our towns. These additional measures are expected to continue until Spring 2021.
- InvestSK are supporting the recovery of the business community by re-engaging with businesses on their plans for recovery. A virtual business meeting was held on 2nd July to identify the type of support businesses require. A further business briefing took place on the 2nd September to focus on what skills businesses need in their current and future workforce considering changes post Covid-19. The business briefing is intended to be the start of a detailed dialogue with the business community to better understand skills needs as we move into the period of 'Rethink & Recover' post Covid-19.
- Processing of applications to the discretionary grant fund is nearing completion. The first 84 payments were made within two weeks of the initial closing date for the scheme. Payments have then continued to be made as outstanding queries are resolved and applications are processed. To date SKDC have paid 221 businesses a total of £1.2 million. There remains a further £320,000 still to be paid out, this will be covered through existing applications received as part of the initial application process. Government have set an end date of 28th August for funding decisions to be made and 30th September for all payments to have been issued.

1.3 The 'Re-Start' phase considers the need for housing that meets the needs of our residents. This includes recommencement of housing management services and addressing the backlog of routine repairs.

- Housing Officer duties such as: dealing with non-urgent anti-social behaviour, allocations from register, sign-up for new tenancies and follow up visits have been

successfully implemented. Garage management and ground maintenance inspections are pending whilst focus is placed on other important tasks post lock-down.

- The housing repairs service are facing new challenges following the impact of Covid-19. Procuring core materials such as plaster and timber is proving to be difficult following national shortages due to the continuation of the furlough scheme affecting manufacturing. Communicating when supplies are available has allowed operational planning and service delivery to be achieved despite these difficulties.
- There has been a phased response approach to housing repairs. 1,050 emergency repair jobs were completed during the three-month lock-down period. In June the Covid-19 risk assessment was adjusted allowing work to be undertaken in addition to emergency work, 725 jobs were completed predominately focusing on external work. In July repairs jobs totalled 868, moving to a maximum of two hours in tenanted properties. From August exposure time increased to four hours. A review will take place during September based on government guidance and local health intelligence.

1.4 The recovery plan recognises the need to continue the strong relations made with the voluntary sector and other partnership agencies. Building strong communities with high quality facilities is an important area of focus and work is progressing to support this, for example:

- Due to the Covid-19 restrictions for the re-opening of theatres, an Autumn season of on-line arts has been scheduled. In addition, from September a programme of work has been arranged with a small number of regular users of the Arts Centres that can adhere to Covid-19 safety guidelines. Activities will be limited to the Gallery and Ballroom in Stamford and the Ballroom and Newton Room in Grantham to meet distancing regulations. Socially distanced films are planned from October at Stamford Arts Centre, with the safe maximum auditorium capacity to be 26-40 patrons, depending on the number of customers visiting as a unit or bubble.
- East Midlands Building Control service operations have been re-started as customer demand has increased. Work levels have been monitored each week and figures now show the level of work returning to normal. All furloughed staff have progressively returned to work with the last remaining staff returning on the 10th August 2020.

1.5 A key component of the 'Re-start' phase of the recovery plan is maintaining a clean and sustainable environment. Examples of actions taking place in this area are detailed below:

- Waste collection services have been maintained with additional support for rounds to handle the increased waste volumes. Risk assessments in relation to Covid-19 and the impact on street care staff are constantly reviewed.
- Working in partnership with Lincolnshire County Council it has been possible to ensure reopening of the household waste centre has not impacted on depot movements.
- South Kesteven's far-reaching street cleaning initiative 'The Big Clean' has recommenced with a revised schedule taking place from June to September 2020. Communications on the locations of work will be available to residents on the SKDC website.
- Re-mobilising the neighbourhoods team has been a priority. Installation of noise monitoring equipment has fully resumed in line with the precautions set out in the risk assessment; Reactive site visits to a variety of reports are continuing whilst adhering to Covid-19 visiting officer guidance; car park enforcement is now fully operational and issuing of littering tickets is being undertaken with precautions and social distancing measures in place.

- Food hygiene inspections have recommenced. They incorporate a Covid-19 secure audit with extra care taken when visits are made to high risk settings, such as nursing homes and schools. Additional temporary staff resource is now in place to provide increased capacity to carry out tasks relating to the Covid-19 local outbreak management arrangements. A shift from business closure enquiries to COVID-secure concerns has occurred as businesses have re-opened.
- Building on and embedding carbon reductions is a further area of focus for SKDC following the climate emergency declared in September 2019. The carbon footprint and reduction opportunities report is now published on the Council's website. Following on from the project recommendations in the carbon footprint report, suggested carbon reduction projects are being reviewed and individually costed.

1.6 The recovery plan also seeks to ensure that the council achieves high levels of performance across all its services. A variety of actions were listed to achieve this objective which are detailed below:

- Further work has been completed to digitise the customer service offer. Digitising the parking season ticket application and Stamford residents parking permits will allow residents to complete the application and pay online making transactions more efficient. Also, an appointment only face to face operating model is now in place for the Grantham and Bourne offices.
- The community Hub continues to provide valuable support to our communities. Hub calls were transferred to customer services on the 6th July 2020. Customer service advisors manage the enquiries with the option to escalate to the original team where needed. Calls are now managed during office hours following analysis of the most common calling periods. Out of hours provision is still in place. Customer service advisors have been trained on how to support/sign-post residents with Covid-19 related enquiries.
- Safety legislation and guidance has remained at the forefront of the Council's operations. Risk assessments have been developed to include Covid-19 related controls for both building use and work activities. Continuing changes to government guidance require ongoing reviews to ensure the authority meets its obligations.

2 Performance Reporting to Committee

2.1 An overview of performance against agreed indicators is set out below for quarter one. The performance dashboards are included in appendices 1-7. The dashboards show performance against targets, as well as benchmarking information where available. An updated commentary also explains the performance and any associated implications.

- Appendix 1 shows rent collection for quarter one was marginally below target by 0.15%. All recovery was suspended for March – August, formal recovery action has been re-introduced w/c 7th September 2020. (Section 3 of the report explains in more detail the impact Covid-19 has had on revenues collection.)
- Appendix 2 shows council tax performance from April to June 2020 during which all enforcement activity and court work was suspended. There was an influx of deferral requests during this period where residents requested to defer April and May payments to later in the year, totalling £242,000.
- Appendix 3 shows non-domestic rate performance in the same period. A total of £20.3 million has been awarded in Expanded Retail Discount to 958 businesses. Although

this has removed any charge for these businesses for 2020/21 it has become more challenging to recover outstanding instalments for the remaining businesses. There was an influx of deferral requests during quarter one where businesses requested to defer April and May payments to later in the year, totalling £97,000.

- Appendix 4 shows that planning applications processing times for 'major', 'minor' and 'other' applications were all above the national target. This has largely been achieved using extensions of time, utilised to manage increased workloads and reduced capacity whilst several vacant roles have been filled. Average days of determination remains high due to: Reduced capacity; changes to the constitution meaning all major applications must be determined by Committee and complexities of some major applications.
- Appendix 5 shows 45 homes have been completed in quarter one 2020/21 compared with 128 new homes built in quarter one 2019/20. The lower delivery rate is due to the impacts of Covid-19 on the housing market. Two homes completed were 'affordable'. The supply of homes classed as affordable will continue to be monitored and reported in the performance dashboard.
- Appendix 6 shows complaints/compliments data for all service areas. Total complaints for quarter one declined by 11% from 151 in 19/20 to 134 in 20/21. Of the 134 complaints received the highest volume is from Street Care service at 74% of the total complaints. This service has the highest frequency of transactions through customer services with 22% of total customer contacts. The level of compliments received for Street Care are the highest with 74% of total compliments received. Reflective of the positive response by residents on the waste service received during the lockdown period. As part of the next phase (post lockdown) a review will take place of the process of developing a new complaints system solution to provide more detailed feedback.
- Appendix 7 shows the waste performance dashboard. Waste figures for quarter one of 2020/21 show a positive increase in the recycling reuse and composting rate, rising to 45.7% compared to 41.5% in the same period for 2019/20. It is shown that this is partly driven by a 700 tonne increase in garden waste collections but supported by an increase in recycling volumes of around 400 tonnes. Domestic residual waste remains constant at around 2,800 tonnes per month in total during the same period. The waste dashboard was presented to Environment overview and scrutiny committee on 21st July 2020. A workshop will be held on Tuesday 15th September to discuss further environment related performance measures which will be reported directly to that committee on an ongoing basis.

3 Covid-19 Impact on Revenues Performance

- 3.1 Since the start of Covid-19 and the impact of the lockdown from 23rd March, there has been significant changes to the collection activity following the suspension of all recovery activity. During this suspension period, the revenue teams have focused more specifically on providing support and advice to residents and businesses. Ordinarily there would usually be approximately 11,000 council tax reminders and 1,300 business rates reminders issued during this period. Therefore, following the re-commencement of formal recovery action there will be a reinstatement of activity to ensure that collection rates return to the profiled levels.

3.2 Collection performance to end of July 2020:

20/21	Council Tax	Business Rates	Rents
Annual collection rate	Target is 19/20 actual which is 98.68%	Target is 19/20 actual which is 99.16%	98.50%
Target Collection rate to end of July 20	38.34%	40.27%	32.80%
Actual collection rate to end of July 20	37.55%	40.03%	31.10%

3.3 Council Tax collection:

- The annual council tax bills were received by residents 10 days before the start of lockdown, collection is below by 1.06% which is £905,383 and the 2020/2/1 net liability has increased by £2,802,726.
- During the lockdown, deferral requests for council tax collection from April and May to later in the year totalled £242,000 during quarter one.
- Direct debit cancellations total £141,000 for the period April – July compared with £26.8m 'called' representing a 0.5% rejection rate. There remains a balance of £436,305 remaining from the Government allocated additional Council Tax Support hardship which, when awarded, will assist reducing the collectible liability.
- The table below shows the most up to date collection performance as at 31 August 2020 compared with the position as at 31 August 2019.

	Collection %	Net liability (£)	Total net receipt (£)
August 2020	46.44	85,413,478	39,663,774
August 2019	47.50	82,610,752	39,236,851
Difference	-1.06	+2,802,726	+426,923

- As a result of Covid-19, South Kesteven have seen an increase in the number of residents in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS). The number of those in receipt has increased by 661 since 1st April 2020, resulting in an increase cost to the scheme of £466,504. The cost of the scheme is shared between SKDC and the precepting authorities (Lincolnshire County Council and Police and Crime Commissioner).

3.4 Business Rates (NNDR) collection:

- It is not possible to compare the collection performance to previous years due to the significant difference in the collectible debit following the high number of business

receiving 100% business rate relief for 2020/21. As at 31st August, the collection rate was 46.50% which is £11,197,710 of the net collectible £24 million. This leaves a balance of £12,884,374 remaining between September and 31 March 2021.

	Collection %	Total net liability (£)	Total net receipt (£)
August 2020	46.50	24,082,084	11,197,710
August 2019	49.12	43,044,169	21,143,898
Difference	-2.62	-18,962,085	-9,946,188

- A total of £20.3 million has been awarded in Expanded Retail Discount to 958 businesses and nursery relief (for registered childcare providers to 30 nurseries totalling £305,000).
- The revenues teams worked closely with InvestSK to administer the business grants as part of the Covid-19 support. The total grants awarded were as follows:
 - For small businesses and retail, hospitality and leisure grant scheme 2,284 businesses have been awarded grants totalling £27.7 million.
 - The discretionary grants scheme awarded 221 businesses that have been paid a total of £1.2 million.

3.5 Rents collection:

- Rents also had no formal recovery since March with all court action currently suspended. However, during this period there has been proactive contact with tenants by officers in order to provide support and assistance and Discretionary Housing Payments of £69,574 have been allocated to those residents in need leaving a balance of £220k for the remainder of the year.
- Rent collection for quarter one was only below 19/20 target by 0.15%. The actual rent collected was £5,961,486 against a target of £6,001,384.
- There will be ongoing challenges for recovery of rents for the rest of 20/21. This includes an increase in former tenant arrears of £22,463 (currently £410,986).

4 Key Terms and Definitions

4.1 Benchmarking groups

Where possible benchmarking groups have been selected to provide context to South Kesteven's performance figures. The benchmarking datasets are explained below:

- Council Tax & Non-Domestic Rates: The benchmarking groups for these measures are provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). Authorities are matched against a range of different measure to ensure near statistical neighbour comparisons are possible.
- Waste: This group compares performance against the members of the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership who operate under the same contractual obligations.

- Rents: Benchmarking for this area is currently under review to ensure that the authority is compared with similar organisations and that a meaningful comparison can be undertaken. This will be included in future reports once the review has been completed.

4.2 Definitions

4.3 The dashboards seek to present information in plain English. However, a small number of technical terms are still used. These are explained below.

- Major applications are those for more than 10 dwellings or over 1,000 sqm non-residential floorspace.
- Non-major applications are those which include householder, minor and other types of applications.
- Minor applications are those for less than 10 dwellings or below a floorspace of 1,000 sqm for non-residential development. It includes applications for change of use.
- Other applications include householders, listed building consent and advertisement consent applications.
- Non-Recyclables includes crisp packets, contaminated paper/card and wood, alongside hazardous materials such as batteries, liquids and nappies.

5 Financial Implications

5.1 The financial considerations where appropriate are referenced throughout this report.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Alison Hall-Wright, Head of Finance

6 Legal and Governance Implications

6.1 Regular reporting on agreed performance dashboards is to be welcomed from a governance point of view, as it provides a transparent mechanism for reporting on performance.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Mandy Braithwaite, Legal Executive

7 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

7.1 There are no issues relating to equality and diversity or safeguarding resulting from this report. Any issues that do arise relating to individual items will be addressed as required.

8 Risk and Mitigation

8.1 The contents of this report do not expose the authority to any additional risks.

9 Community Safety Implications

9.1 None.

10 How will the recommendations support South Kesteven District Council's declaration of a climate emergency?

10.1 The contents of this report do not have a direct impact on the council's carbon emissions or the carbon emissions of the wider district.

11 Background Papers

11.1 The 'Big Clean' schedule of works:

<http://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=12438>

11.2 The Carbon Footprint report:

<http://www.southkesteven.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15062>

12 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Rents Performance Dashboard

Appendix 2 – Council Tax Performance Dashboard

Appendix 3 – Non-Domestic Rates Performance Dashboard

Appendix 4 – Planning Process Performance Dashboard

Appendix 5 – House Builds Performance Dashboard

Appendix 6 – Complaints Performance Dashboard

Appendix 7 – Waste Performance Dashboard

Report Timeline:	Date of Publication on Forward Plan (if required)	Not Applicable
	Previously Considered by: Finance, Economic Development and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	30 June 2020
	Final Decision date	Not Applicable