

Council Performance & Budget Summary

May 2015

The monthly performance summary outlines trends in information the Council uses to monitor and manage service delivery. Where relevant, it includes performance against targets set for the relevant period.

Overview

G	Budget – 0.0% overspend
A	Performance indicators

Appendices

- A. Planning Update
- B. Business Friendly Procurement and Services Update
- C. Appraisals Update
- D. Housing Update
- E. Pay Policy Update
- F. Leisure Update
- G. Part 2 City Centre Opportunity Site Update

Recommendations

1.1 That Cabinet notes the Council Performance and Budget Summary (May 2015) and its appendices.

Changes to benefit fraud reporting arrangements

From June 2015 all Benefit fraud, including Housing Benefit fraud, will be investigated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The Housing Benefit Department will still be referring cases to the DWP for investigation where they believe Housing Benefit fraud is taking place.

The public can report suspected fraud:

- By telephone on (0800) 854 440
- Online at www.gov.uk/report-benefit-fraud
- By post to NBFH, PO Box 224, Preston PR1 1GP

A flyer for residents outlining the changes is available from the Council reception.

The Council will continue to identify and deal directly with other types of fraud.

Commentary

The table below is provided for indicators where there has been significant change in performance. It gives more detailed explanation for the performance levels and any action the Council is taking to improve performance.

	Measure	Comments
G	Average time to re-let dwellings (excluding temporary accommodation) (days)	The issues with statutory safety checks reported last month have been addressed. The average time to re-let dwellings has fallen to 22 days and is now within the target of 26 days.
R	Percentage of rent loss due to voids	<p>The total rent loss due to voids is projected at 1.55% of the annual rent due (ie £411,463). This figure also includes the following properties which are not available for re-letting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Betty Entwistle House which we plan to transfer to housing association, BPHA, as part of our sheltered housing redevelopment programme • Linley Court which is also part of our sheltered housing redevelopment programme • Albert Street which we are selling • Lower Dagnall Street which we are selling <p>The rent loss due to voids figure will continue to be significantly influenced by our sheltered housing redevelopment programme. If the above properties are removed from the overall figure, the rent loss which we are actively managing is £177,619 for the year or 0.66% of the rent due.</p>
A	Rent arrears of current tenants as a percentage of rent due	Rent arrears have increased because recent housing benefit overpayments have been added to rent accounts, increasing the payments due. There is also a vacant post in the rent arrears team which is being covered temporarily. Further training and support is in place to address the situation.
A	Number of households in temporary accommodation	<p>The high use of temporary accommodation continues. In May the housing options team dealt with 208 enquiries, an increase from 200 in April. There were 15 formal homeless applications and 11 homeless acceptances.</p> <p>New developments at Parkside View in St Albans and Sparrow Court in Wheathampstead are due to open in Summer 2015. This should release some general needs rental properties to applicants on the housing register.</p>
G	Days to process Housing Benefit new claims	The number of days to process Housing Benefit new claims has fallen to 23.9 days in March. The Benefits' team has prioritised processing of new claims in light of April's performance. Staffing levels also returned to normal following the Easter period, increasing capacity.
A	Percentage of Council's planning decisions supported at appeal	This level of appeals allowed (i.e. about 60 over the last 12 months) is just over 1.5% of the approximately 3,700 planning decisions made by the Council in the last 12 months. A general theme from recent appeal decisions is that Inspectors are taking a more relaxed approach to design issues such as materials and the design and placement of windows. They have also generally considered

	Measure	Comments
	(cumulative 12 month)	extensions to dwellings to be acceptable. Officers are considering whether this requires a change in their approach to assessing similar applications.
R	Percentage of planning applications not determined (within time limits or agreed timescale)	For the financial year 2014-2015, there were 215 more planning applications received (6.1% more) and 211 more decisions made (8.7% more) than last year. Recruitment and retention has had an impact on performance. Recently offers have been made to fill several vacant posts - see staffing section to the Planning and Building Control Appendix (A). Determining older applications has an impact on the percentage of applications determined in time and will continue to do so for next few months.
A	Parking Penalty Charge Notices issued	The number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued has risen slightly compared to April, but is not significantly different from the ongoing trend.

Key

The performance information is colour coded associated to the target or trend.

For indicators with a target – Green is where a target is achieved or exceeded, Amber is up to 10% worse than target and Red is more than 10% worse than target. For indicators with trend analysis – Green highlights an improved performance and Red a worse performance.

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Council Performance & Budget Summary

May 2015

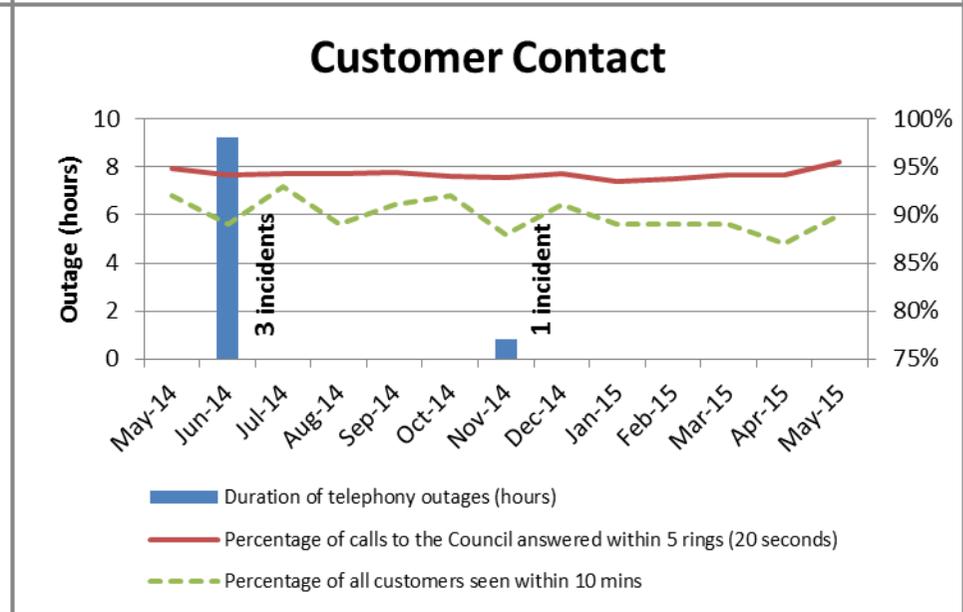
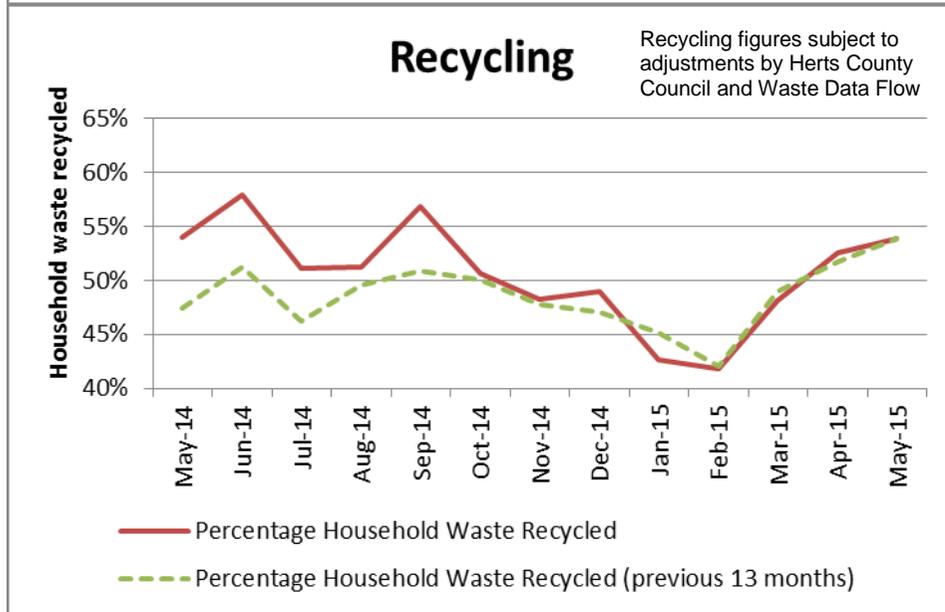
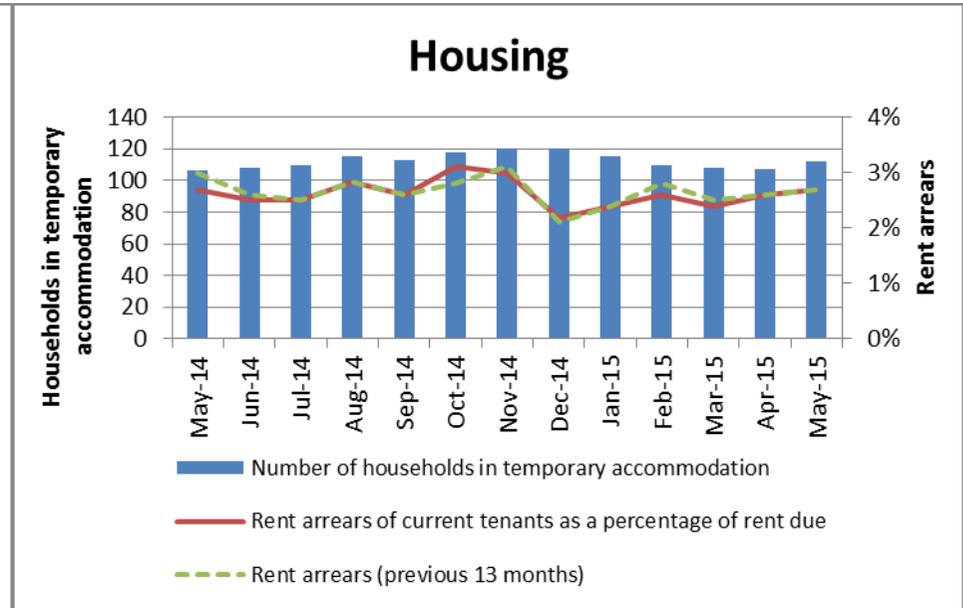
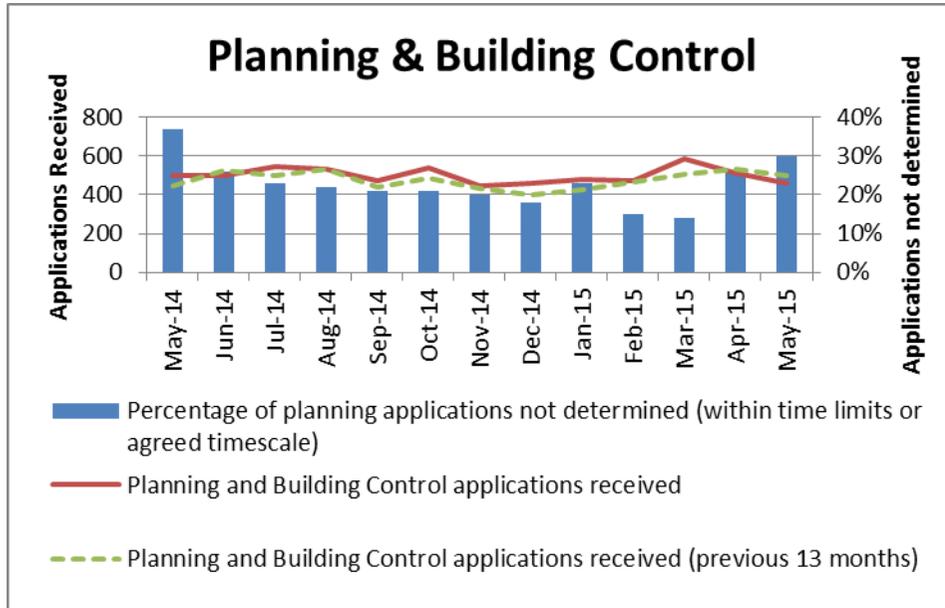


		Bigger or Smaller is Better	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14	Dec-14	Jan-15	Feb-15	Mar-15	Apr-15	May-15	TARGET
Finance	Forecast budget variance at the year end (General fund for year in question)	Smaller	-0.2%	-0.1%	0.0%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%	1.0%	2.3%	1.9%	1.6%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Housing	Average time to re-let dwellings (excluding temporary accommodation) (days)	Smaller	22	22	17	22	26	32	24	25	33	24	19	29	22	26
	Percentage of rent loss due to voids	Smaller	1.05%	1.03%	1.05%	1.05%	1.08%	1.09%	1.10%	1.12%	1.15%	1.18%	1.21%	1.51%	1.55%	Trend
	Rent arrears of current tenants as a percentage of rent due (targets updated for 2014-15)	Smaller	2.7%	2.5%	2.5%	2.8%	2.6%	3.1%	3.0%	2.2%	2.4%	2.6%	2.4%	2.6%	2.7%	2.5%^
	Number of households in temporary accommodation	Smaller	106	108	110	115	113	118	120	120	115	110	108	107	112	Trend
	Average time in temporary accommodation (weeks)	Smaller	23	19	25	25	25	24	25	27	28	28	26	24	22	Trend
	Percentage of repairs completed on time	Bigger	100%	100%	100%	99%	98%	100%	98%	99%	99%	100%	99%	100%	99%	98%
	Housing repairs satisfaction	Bigger	99%	100%	99%	99%	99%	99%	100%	99%	100%	99%	98%	98%	98%	99%
	Total number of households in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax support	Smaller	7,490	7,517	7,536	7,509	7,490	7,445	7,408	7,346	7,295	7,241	7,248	7,211	7,244	
	Days to process Housing Benefit new claims	Smaller	29.7	18.3	23.5	19.3	21.6	19.4	28.2	26.6	29.6	20.8	23.0	28.7	23.9	24
	Days to process Housing Benefit change in circumstances	Smaller	6.8	6.5	6.3	6.7	7.2	6.2	8.0	6.9	3.2	3.3	8.1	5.5	7.9	11
Planning & Building Control	Planning and Building Control applications received (including pre-app, trees and condition discharge)		499*	499*	544*	533*	471*	539*	445*	459*	478*	473*	586*	512*	459	
	Percentage of Council's planning decisions supported at appeal (cumulative 12 month)	Bigger	61%	61%	61%	63%	66%	66%	65%	63%	61%	61%	61%	61%	62%	66%
	Percentage of planning applications not determined (within time limits or agreed timescale)	Smaller	37%	26%	23%	22%	21%	21%	20%	18%	23%	15%	14%	26%	30%	25%
Regulatory	Parking Penalty Charge Notices issued	Smaller	1,387	1,206	1,298	1,291	1,520	1,671	1,477	1,632	1,597	1,469	1,739	1,511	1,549	Trend
	Percentage of Parking Penalty Charge Notices paid	Bigger	89%	92%	84%	78%	82%	84%	87%	86%	85%	90%	85%	89%	86%	70%
Community Services	Fly-tipping incidents	Smaller	74	95	89	60	55	52	52	61	68	93	96	68	74**	Year-on-year Trend
	Number of missed waste collections per 100,000	Smaller	14	17	18	18	51 ¹	48	38	33	30	30	28	33	34**	40
	Visits to Tourist Information Centre and www.enjoystalbens.com	Bigger	33,534	34,084	35,051	35,418	35,050	46,952	65,316	52,316	32,862	31,953	35,330	31,155	40,556	Year-on-year Trend
	Museums visits	Bigger	12,443	13,528	13,225	13,277	15,599	18,312	16,969	13,475	14,396	18,184	17,263	17,134	14,713	Year-on-year Trend
Customer Services	Percentage of calls to the Council answered within 5 rings (20 seconds)	Bigger	94.9%	94.1%	94.3%	94.3%	94.4%	94.0%	93.9%	94.3%	93.5%	93.8%	94.2%	94.2%	95.5%	80%
	Percentage of all customers seen within 10 mins	Bigger	92%	89%	93%	89%	91%	92%	88%	91%	89%	89%	89%	87%	90%	80%
External	Claimant count (% proportion of population)	Smaller	1.1%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	Trend
	New jobs	Bigger	1,196	1,128	1,421	1,312	1,541	1,541	2,250	2,349	3,214	3,024	4,817	6,081	6,955	Trend
	All crime (in month)	Smaller	520	554	516	456	519	496	485	493	500	473	574	526	530	Trend
	Anti-social behaviour incidents (in month)	Smaller	221	251	273	220	228	237	199	162	161	192	190	250	218	Trend

^ Seasonal Target for Rent Arrears
 Quarter 1 (Apr-Jun): 2.5%
 Quarter 2 (Jul-Sep): 2.9%
 Quarter 3 (Oct-Dec) 3.1%
 Quarter 4 (Jan-Mar) 3.3%

* figures revised from April 2015
 **draft figure subject to final adjustments
¹ recording system changed from this month on

Performance Summary May 2015



Wheathampstead Parish Council – proposed Neighbourhood Plan Area

Wheathampstead Parish Council has notified us of their intention to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council has applied to designate the entire Parish as a Neighbourhood Plan Area. The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 has been amended recently. This now requires local planning authorities to publish decisions on proposed Neighbourhood Plan Areas within eight weeks of the consultation start date. The consultation is currently taking place.

The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) – James Marshall House, Harpenden

The Planning Inspectorate has confirmed that the inquiry into an appeal by Pegasus Life will open on 24 November 2015 at St Albans Council Offices for 6 days. The proposed application is for demolition of existing buildings and construction of later living accommodation consisting of 38 apartments with communal facilities.

The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) - Land at Oakland's College, St Albans Campus

The appeal for this site was received on 28 May 2015. The appellant – VRG Planning has requested an inquiry. The procedure will be determined by the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with Section 319A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The decision will be based on the published criteria and will take account of the views expressed by both the appellant and the local planning authority.

The Council has been asked to submit comments to the Planning Inspectorate by 10 June 2015.

Highways England: Planning for the Future and Facilitating Growth

The Council has been informed about significant changes to the Highways Agency's role in the planning system, brought about by the launch of Highways England on 1 April. Highways England remains a statutory consultee on draft local plans and development proposals, but with a changed approach.

Highways England is now designated a government company. From 1st April, it no longer gives direction to local planning authorities, only advice. Highways England will continue to respond to consultations within 21 days.

Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Bill

The House of Lords has approved a third reading of MP Richard Bacon's Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Bill. The Bill, seen as the first legislative step in the Government's Right to Build initiative, only requires Royal Assent before becoming an Act of Parliament.

The Bill will require councils to keep a register of individuals and community groups who have expressed an interest in acquiring land for self-build and custom-build projects. It will also require councils to take account of, and make provisions for, the interests of those registered in developing their housing initiatives and their local plans.

Ariston Site, land off Harpenden Road

The submission of Hertfordshire County Council's planning application for this site continues to be delayed. Following pre application discussions in March with the District Council, the County Council are revising the documents. They tell us that they now expect to submit the application before end of August. The continuing delays have been raised at senior level with HCC.

Green Ring

The Green Ring cycle and walkway involves works on common land in two areas:

- On Bernards Heath between Harpenden Road and the recreation ground on Sandridge Road.
- On the southerly verge of Sandpit Lane between Walton Street and Lemsford Road.

SADC applied for consent to carry out work on Bernards Heath and also jointly applied, with HCC, to carry out work on Sandpit Lane Wastes (also common land).

Following an application to the Planning Inspectorate of DEFRA for permission to carry out works on common land, approval has been granted for work at Bernards Heath. The works are expected to be completed by the end of June.

However, consent has not yet been granted for work at Sandpit Lane Wastes. There have been objections to the works proposed by HCC for outside St Saviours View in Sandpit Lane. There has been a lengthy exchange of correspondence and a site meeting with objectors and the Planning Inspectorate of DEFRA to consider issues of concern. The consent process is now concluded and we are waiting for the Inspectorate to make a final ruling. Should consent for the proposed work at Sandpit Lane Wastes be received shortly, a start can be made on a large element of the remaining works quickly. This would be in the areas where the works will not affect the highway.

If this consent is received, HCC can also begin works to install the new crossing on Sandpit Lane, which connects with this part of the Ring. These works will take longer, as HCC will need to book 'road space' to work on the highway. For this they must give three months' notice – a statutory requirement. In addition, HCC advises that it will take approximately three weeks to install the crossing. This means that it would be likely to be completed in October.

80 Oakwood Road, Bricket Wood

In 2014, the Council brought legal proceedings against a company for allegedly wilfully destroying seven trees at Oakwood Road, Bricket Wood contrary to a tree preservation order (TPO) and without consent of the local planning authority. The defendant company pleaded not guilty. A hearing was held at St Albans Magistrates Court on 30 and 31 March.

Part way through the prosecution proceedings, the Judge dismissed the case following a submission made on behalf of the defendant company. The dismissal was related to lack of documentation put forward to evidence the serving of the orders several decades ago. An application for costs by the Defendant against the Council was dismissed.

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix A: Planning Update



The Council is now considering whether on-going work reviewing our tree preservation orders should be expedited. We will also be carrying out a 'lessons learned' review to see what improvements to processes can be made as a result of the experience with this case.

55 Victoria Street, St Albans

An application by W E Black Limited to judicially review the Council's decision to grant planning permission 5/14/1027 succeeded in the Planning Court on 4 June 2015. The Council, as Defendants, were ordered to pay the Claimant's costs in the sum of £14,465.

The claim was brought by W E Black Limited which owns 53 Victoria Street St Albans. The company was granted prior approval under the General Permitted Development Order to convert the office building into 14 flats on 14 March 2014. At that time there was an unexpired planning permission for a 4 storey office building and 11 residential units at 55 Victoria Street. Planning permission 5/14/1027 was granted on 31 October 2014 for a 4 storey office building and 14 residential units at 55 Victoria Street.

A challenge was brought by Judicial Review in the Planning Court in December 2014. The matter was heard before John Howell QC sitting as a Deputy High Court Judge on 2 June 2015 with Judgment being read out on 4 June. The full reasons for the permission being quashed will be available when the transcript of the judgment is received. However, in summary, the Judge took the view that the Council's Planning Officer report did not fully take into account the residential amenity of the occupants of 53 Victoria Street in determining the application (5/14/1027).

The application will now come back to the Council for re-determination.

Rail Freight

On 14 July 2014, the Secretary of State issued his decision allowing the appeal. The Council has challenged the decision in the High Court. The case was heard on 3 and 4 February 2015.

The Council's recent challenge to this decision in the High Court was rejected on 13 March 2015. The Council has sought leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal. A decision on the leave to appeal is expected shortly.

Sewell Park, land off Harpenden Road

Appeals against earlier refusals (5/2013/2713 for 85 dwellings, and 5/2011/2857 for 116 houses and 72 bed care home), were heard at a public inquiry beginning on 21 July 2014. Both appeals have been 'called-in' by the Secretary of State for his determination.

The Council was previously informed that a decision would be made on or before 23 March 2015. A revised date for the decision was given as being on or before 10 June 2015. This has now been delayed to on or before 12 August 2015.

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix A: Planning Update



Beaumont School and land north of Winches Farm. Hatfield Road

Outline planning permission was granted by the District Council in 2014 for residential development (up to 75 dwellings, sports pitches and new classrooms). Subsequently the County Council granted full permission for a new sports' pitch. The County Council has applied to vary some of the conditions attached to the outline permission to reflect the changes made to the scheme. This is as a result of HCC granting permission for the replacement sports' pitch. The current application 5/2015/0797 is expected to be determined shortly. We are talking to the school to discuss how best to work with them on their schemes in future.

Staffing

Cabinet discussed the issue of Planning and Building Control Department staffing at its meetings in February, March, June and July 2014 and in October 2014.

On 23 October, Cabinet agreed to increase the Council's team to include four new full time equivalent posts in the Planning Service. These are three posts in Development Management and one in the Spatial Planning team.

The position in relation to the vacant posts is shown in the table below. Green designates posts for which start dates are confirmed. Amber designates posts for which start dates are yet to be confirmed, or currently filled by agency cover.

	Post	Last month	Update
1	Development Management Team Leader	Internal appointment. Start date confirmed 18 May 2015	In post
2	Enforcement Team Leader – retitled Planning and Building Investigations Team Leader	Start date confirmed 27 April 2015	In post
3	Deputy Development Management Team Leader	Post now vacant following appointment of Deputy to be Team Leader. The full time post is now being advertised.	Offer made and verbally accepted.
4	Lead Planner	Internal appointment. Started 23 March 2015	In post
5	Development Management Planner	Started 30 March 2015	In Post
6	Development Management Planner	Offer accepted and HR checks underway	In post – started 7 May 2015
7	Enforcement Officer – retitled Planning and Building Investigations Officer	Internal appointment. Started 30 March 2015	In post

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix A: Planning Update

8	Enforcement Officer – retitled Planning and Building Investigations Officer	Post needs to be re-advertised. Agency cover currently in place	Offer accepted and HR checks underway
9	Planning Apprentice	Offer accepted and start date 18 May 2015	In post
10	Development Management Planner	Post vacant following resignation. Post to be filled by current member of staff acting up	Secondment in place
11	Development Management Planner	Post vacant following resignation. Post to be filled by current member of staff acting up	Secondment in place
12	Development Management Planner	Post vacant following internal appointment. Post being advertised	Interviews taken place. Offer made and verbally accepted. HR checks being undertaken.
13	Assistant Development Management Planner	Post vacant due to staff acting up to post above. Post to be filled by current member of staff acting up	Secondment in place
14	Assistant Development Management Planner	Post vacant due to staff acting up to post above. Post to be filled by current member of staff acting up	Secondment in place
15	Compliance and Monitoring Officer	Agency cover in place. Post to be advertised following internal appointment	Interviews taken place. Offer made and verbally accepted. HR checks being undertaken.
16	Senior Spatial Planning Officer	Post vacant following resignation. Post being advertised	Interviews taken place. Offer made and verbally accepted. HR checks being undertaken.
17	Spatial Planning Officer	Post vacant following resignation. Post being advertised	Interviews taken place. Offer made and verbally accepted. HR checks being undertaken.
18	Graduate Planning Officer	Post vacant following resignation. Post being advertised	Post currently advertised
19	Development Management Team Leader (Maternity Cover)	Agency cover in place. Interviewing candidates week commencing 9th March	Interim cover in place

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix A: Planning Update

20	Technical Support Technician		Currently acting up in secondment as Assistant Development Management Planner (see row 13 above)
21	Technical Support Technician		Currently acting up in secondment as Assistant Development Management Planner (see row 14 above)
22	Technical Support Technician		Due to commence maternity leave June 2015.

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix B: Business Friendly Procurement and Services Update

The Council has developed a plan to make it easier for businesses to compete for Council business and to use our services. This was the result of two corporate priority projects for 2013/14. These were:

- Develop a more business friendly Council; and
- Explore ways to give more opportunities for local business in Council procurement.

Procurement

Progress to date:

- Encouraged bidders of major contracts to use local workforce:
 - This was specified as part of the Roalco (housing maintenance), Willmott Dixon (construction) and Borrás (housing refurbishment) contracts. These are all Hertfordshire based companies.
 - In the construction of Cotlandswick Leisure Centre, 77% of the workforce lived within 20 miles of the site.
 - Roof works at Telford Court were awarded to a Hertfordshire business, MH Goldsmith.
- Reviewed, and reduced, where possible, insurance requirements in contracts.
 - A small business – Insight Engineering Ltd - won a contract to provide Health and Safety support for waste management. The insurance requirement was then adapted at the appropriate level for this size contract.
- Published a list of contract opportunities using the contract register (this will be updated regularly) -
<http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/business/procurement/contracts/default.aspx>
- Used Supply Herts <http://www.supplyhertfordshire.uk/> to publish all formal tendering opportunities over £25,000 where the Procurement Team is involved.
- Tailored guidance to small and local businesses provided on the Supply Hertfordshire Toolkit <https://supplyhertfordshire.g2b.info/suppliers/toolkit>
- Listed all major Council contracts and procurement card expenditure on our Transparency webpage www.stalbans.gov.uk/transparency
- Provided a written debrief to all tenderers (where the Procurement Team was actively involved in the tender), whether successful or not.
- Made sure tenders have no 'big business' bias or ask for inappropriately specific experience (e.g., tender for Interpretation and Exhibition Design for the Town Hall Museum and Galleries project, won by an SME, Urban Salon).
- Encouraging bidders for major contracts to sub-contract packages to local firms (e.g., this now forms part of our tender evaluation criteria in the Waste Management Contract re- tendering which is currently out to tender).
- In the construction of Cotlandswick Leisure Centre, 28% of Willmott Dixon's suppliers were local firms (within 20 miles) and 78% were SMEs.

Future Plans

We are:

- Encouraging consortia of businesses to bid. Our tender instructions now allow for consortia bids (e.g. the Joint Pest Control and Stray Dog tender due out soon specifically allows consortia to bid).

Appendix B: Business Friendly Procurement and Services Update

- Being proactive in offering support and advice on Council procurement (e.g. we are participating in the St Albans Business Festival's 'Meet The Experts' event).
- Refreshing the Council's Procurement Best Practice Guide to reflect recent changes to the procurement regulations. This has been delayed from March 2015 because the regulations were issued later than expected, but a first draft is now expected by September 2015. This will provide guidance for officers undertaking procurements. It will have a strong focus on enabling SMEs and local businesses to access smaller value contracts.

Service Improvement Plans

Council departments are working on the following:

- Developing a code of practice on the use of A Boards and banners (by March 2016)
- Introducing a new e-service so that businesses can view their business rates, opt for paperless billing payment and report changes online (by July 2015).
- Introducing one point of contact for building control and development management (by end of 2015)

Later in the year we will be working with St Albans District Chamber of Commerce to ask local businesses for feedback on how the plan is working.

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix C: Appraisals Update



Appraisal Completion 12th June 2015

Department	Number of appraisals expected	Number of appraisals held to date	Signed appraisals received by HR	% appraisals signed-off and sent to HR
CEX Policy & Partnership	15	15	15	100%
Community Services	68	68	68	100%
Corporate Services	46	45	44	96%
Finance	31	31	27	87%
Heads of Service	7	7	7	100%
Housing	83	81	81	98%
Legal, Democratic & Regulatory	52	52	52	100%
Planning & Building Control	51	50	45	88%

Notes:

The above list excludes cases where reviews were not held due to valid reasons being given:

9 Long Term Sick, **3** Maternity Leave, **2** Suspended, **1** Career Break

We have incorporated the following new features of the appraisal process in this cycle:-

- All staff now have a 'customer focus' objective
- All managers have at least one 'management' objective
- 360° degree feedback included for Senior Management team (Heads of Service and Strategic Principal Officers)

The effectiveness of these new aspects will be evaluated over the summer so that further improvements can be made.

Telford Court

Since the last update to Cabinet, the new water main installation has been completed successfully and work has started on the new electrical installation. This work began on 7th April 2015. Drilling work is completed in 49 properties. The new bus-bar (an electrical conductor for high currents) has been delivered and installed. The connection/switchover of flats onto the new system is taking place between 12 and 30 June 2015 subject to access.

All residents should be on the new system by 30 June. As soon as all flats have been switched over, a date will be agreed with UK Power Networks to decommission the old system. This involves stripping out the chamber; fire stopping; and encapsulating works. This is due to be completed by 31 July 2015. There is an overall delay in the programme of 2 weeks due to the drilling work, which took longer than anticipated, and the need to test for asbestos.

There was a further power outage at Telford Court in May. The power went off at approximately 11.45am on Sunday 3 May and was restored at 6.30pm on Monday 4 May.

During this period the Council's emergency planning process was instigated. Members of staff were present on site. They visited residents and left notices for those who were not in. The Red Cross attended on both days. All residents who required overnight accommodation were accommodated, and in total 12 households were provided with accommodation. Westminster Lodge was made available as a reception centre, but no residents decided to use it. The Police also provided very helpful support. They were on site from Sunday evening until 2am the following morning.

The power outage was not related to the new installation which is taking place on the opposite side of the building. The problem was due to a failure within the old electrics which are being replaced. Arcing in the current bus-bar blew 2 of the 3 main fuses. Remedial works were carried out to insulate the bus-bar, replace the damaged cable and clear out any debris in the chamber. A weekly inspection of the bus-bar chamber is being carried out by Penmilne Contractors, the company currently undertaking the replacement electrical works on site. This will continue until the new bus-bar is commissioned and the switchover takes place.

Penmilne provided an excellent service out of hours, on behalf of the Council, ensuring the time spent with no power was kept to an absolute minimum.

Until the switchover is complete, plans have been made to ensure appropriate staff cover is in place for emergency response should the need arise. The electrical contractor has also arranged a standby rota.

Gold Standard

The Housing Options team has achieved a high score (of 74%) in its peer review which forms part of the government backed Gold Standard challenge. The peer review scheme is designed to help local authorities deliver more efficient and cost effective homelessness prevention services.

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix D: Housing Update



The challenge involves a ten step continuous improvement approach for local authorities who '*strive for continuous improvement in front line housing services*'. It culminates in an application for the Gold Standard Challenge. Having passed the peer review stage, the housing department can now proceed to the formal application process to achieve the Gold Standard. This will take approximately 12 months to complete.

The peer review highlighted the excellent work the Housing Options team is doing. It is recognition that the Council is delivering a high quality homelessness assessment and prevention service. The review highlighted three areas of best practice in particular:

- 1 The St Albans Rent Secure Scheme.** This helps single people and childless couples, who do not meet social housing criteria, to gain access to private rented housing. To date it has assisted over 70 people. See: <http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/Images/StARSS%20leaflet.pdf>
- 2 The relationship with the Housing Benefit department.** Good communication and proximity allow quick solutions to problematic benefit issues, and realistic applications for Discretionary Housing Payments. Officers are able to speak to each other to resolve complex benefit issues that may impact on a household's housing issues.
- 3 The Hub** (the advice, information and guidance service located at the Civic Centre in St Albans). The central location of the Hub allows customers easy access to services. These include services from: the Citizen Advice Bureau, the Credit Union, Aldwyck Housing, Oaklands College, North Hertfordshire Homes, CVS and Community Navigators. See: <http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/contact-us/hub.aspx>

Private Rented Sector Task and Finish Group

At Full Council on 2 April 2014 it was resolved that a Portfolio Holder led cross party Task and Finish Group be set up to look at the following:

- A Landlord Accreditation Scheme
- Establishment of a Private Tenants' Forum
- Practices among local letting agents
- No fault eviction clauses
- Impact on Council resources from the private rented sector

Two meetings were held on 10 September 2014 and 9 March 2015. A wide range of issues relating to the private rented sector were discussed. The first meeting focused on the following areas:

- The Private Rented Sector in St Albans
- The work of the Housing department
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's)
- Empty Homes
- Accreditation/Licensing Schemes operating in the UK

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix D: Housing Update



The second meeting reviewed the Council's motion with a view to developing an action plan for each area. The following was agreed:

1. **Landlord accreditation.** There is currently no such scheme in existence in St Albans. Any such scheme could be voluntary or mandatory. However, as such schemes are resource intensive and there is little evidence suggesting poor landlords in the District, it was agreed that this was not a priority at this time.
2. **Private Tenants' Forum.** There are complexities with setting this up since often the only contact the Council has with tenants living in privately rented accommodation comes if there are problems. There is a need to engage with a wider group, and a good cross-section of tenants, not just those on housing benefit. It was agreed that the Housing Department would pilot a Tenants' Forum with those we have had contact with before, for example those on the Rent Secure Scheme.
3. **Practices among local letting agents.** The Housing Department does not have much contact with lettings agents as they tend not to accept housing benefit tenants. Our contact tends to be with individual landlords. Officers are not aware of any issues with local lettings agents. The Group agreed that no further action was necessary.
4. **No fault eviction clauses.** These arise when a tenant complains about his or her landlord who then serves them with a notice. Again there is little evidence or experience of this in the District. It was therefore agreed by the Group to take no further action.
5. **Impact on Council resources from the private rented sector.** There is currently one Private Sector Housing Officer and another Officer who assists with some of these functions. The Council tends to offer a more reactive service which reflects current resources. The Group reviewed the resources and agreed this was appropriate at this time.

In addition to the outcomes detailed above, the Task and Finish Group suggested that a 'Fit and Proper Landlord' test be implemented. This will ensure that the Council is working with responsible and suitable landlords. It will eliminate the use of landlords who have unspent convictions relating to fraud, violence, or sexual offences, for example. It will also avoid the use of landlords with a history of managing properties badly and illegally evicting tenants.

A document will be prepared and completed for any private sector landlords to whom the Council nominates applicants through the Rent Deposit and Rent Secure schemes. This will be introduced in July 2015.

Sheltered Housing Update

Parkside View (Caroline Sharpe House), Chiltern Road, Marshalswick, St Albans.

This will consist of 35 extra care flats for social rent, with a communal dining area and roof garden.

There have been construction related delays to this project which was due to be completed and opened in March 2015. The revised completion date is the end of June.

The majority of flats have been allocated. There will be two open days in July to allow Councillors and staff to view the new building before residents move in later in July. We will be notifying all Councillors of the dates as soon as they are confirmed.

Sparrow Court (Thomas Sparrow House), Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead.

This is being refurbished by the Council into 13 flats for social rent for applicants over 55. There has been a delay to the original completion date of May 2015 as a result of issues with the power supply and electricity substation. The anticipated completion date is now August 2015.

Choristers Court (Victor Smith Court), Hunters Ride, Bricket Wood.

Work is now progressing to develop eighteen 1 and 2 bedroom flats for social rent. The development is currently on schedule and due for completion in February 2016.

Betty Entwistle House, Holyrood Crescent, St Albans.

The appointed Housing Association, *bpha*, has held a pre-application meeting with the Planning Department. A consultation event will be held over the summer for local residents. Plans for the proposed development of a 41 unit mixed use flexi care scheme will be made available. All remaining residents of the building will be rehoused by the end of June.

A planning application will be submitted later this year with development expected to commence in 2016.

Garage sites update

Two sites, in Alexander Road in London Colney, and Offas Way in Wheathampstead, are due for completion ahead of schedule in July 2015. These will provide nine units of general needs rented occupation.

One site in Cotlandswick is currently being developed into a further 4 units of accommodation. A further three sites in London Colney are awaiting transfer to North Hertfordshire Homes. There have been delays to starting the developments due to legal issues relating to leasehold interests and rights of way. Ongoing discussions are taking place between the Council and North Herts Homes to resolve these to enable the construction of a further 18 units to begin.

Appendix D: Housing Update

Ground surveys have been carried out for three garage sites in Batchwood. We are currently identifying the best way to procure services for project management and contractor to develop the sites which will deliver 25 housing units.

Planning applications for two former garage sites in Sandridge, providing an anticipated 23 units of affordable housing, are due to be submitted in July.

Housing Improvement Programme (HIP) Spend

At the end of 2014/15 the Council had spent £13.5m from the Housing Investment Programme against an original budget of £12.7m. The overspend was primarily due to the purchase of properties and was funded by underspends from previous years.

Approximately £10.6m was spent on improvements to the Council's approx. 5,000 units of housing stock which included:

- replacing 431 boilers
- refurbishing 504 kitchens and 509 bathrooms
- 245 windows
- 563 doors
- 170 pitched roofs
- installing flat roofs to 8 blocks covering 185 properties

Work also started on refurbishing twenty three sheltered housing bedsits, into 13 new properties.

Approximately £2.9m was spent on other items including disabled facilities grants and the purchase of nine properties across the District.

St Claire's, Church Crescent, St Albans

A report was presented to a meeting of the Internal Performance Scrutiny Committee (ISPC) on 8th April 2015. At the meeting it was resolved that the Head of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, and ward Councillors, brings forward answers to questions raised, at the time of the pre-application discussion. These questions included:

- what is the need for temporary accommodation generally and for single people?
- what are the likely terms of eligibility for potential tenants?
- how might the Risk Assessment for referrals operate between the Council and Hightown Housing Association?

It was also agreed that a report will be submitted to the ISPC meeting scheduled for 7 July 2015, on the financial issues raised at this meeting related to the breakdown of costs and alternatives.

A planning application has now been submitted by the Housing Association, Hightown Praetorian and Churches, for the redevelopment of the building. A question and answer sheet has been circulated to local Ward Councillors and residents.

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix D: Housing Update



Staffing

Interim arrangements are in place to assist with staffing in the Asset Management team.

The current vacant posts are:

- Asset Manager
- Asset Management Team Leader
- Building Surveyor – Capital works

A further two Building Surveyor posts will become vacant shortly.

The Tenancy Services and Performance Manager is currently assisting with staff management in the repairs team. The Property and Asset Manager in the Community Services Department is working 2 days per week helping with staff management in the housing project team. Interim managers have been appointed to assist with some key projects, including the stock condition surveys (recently completed) and a procurement strategy for capital works. We are also working with agencies to source cover for the Building Surveyor posts, and the Asset Management Team Leader.

The current structure has been in place for 6/7 years. We are reviewing this to ensure that we have appropriate resilience for the longer term.

Queen's Speech

The Housing Bill includes information on how Councils will be required to dispose of high value vacant properties. This is linked to the extension of the Right to Buy discounts for Housing Association tenants. The full details of these measures are not yet known. This will be covered in a future housing update.

The Council has been selling some of its high value properties and using the proceeds to fund the Council's affordable housing Street Purchase Programme. To date three properties have been sold, one is in the process of being sold and one is currently on the market. The proceeds funded the purchase of nine properties in 2014/15. These are currently being used as accommodation for those in need of temporary housing.

King Offa Pub, Sopwell, St Albans

The Council is progressing the purchase of the King Offa pub. Meetings have been held with Ward Councillors to explore options for short term use of the site before development for affordable housing and community use. The Council is inviting local people to come forward with proposals to put the King Offa pub to temporary business or community use before the site is redeveloped.

Council Performance & Budget Summary

Appendix E: Pay Policy Update



Nationally Agreed Pay Award

The Council participates in a national negotiating process. There are three separately negotiated national agreements, which apply to the Council, covering

- Chief Executives – the JNC Local Authority Terms
- Chief Officers – the JNC Officer Terms
- All other employees - NJC Green Book Terms

The nationally agreed pay award, effective from 1st January 2015 for Chief Officers and all other employees, has been applied and is reflected in the Council's Pay Policy and appendices set out on our website (<http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/paypolicy/>)

The agreed award for Chief Officers was 2% on guaranteed FTE basic salary of £99,999 or less (as at 31 December 2014).

The agreed award for all other employees was 2.2%.

Chief Executive's pay

The nationally agreed pay award for 2015 for Chief Executives was capped this year and only applicable for those who were paid below £99,999. This meant that this Council's Chief Executive was not eligible to receive the national pay award for 2015 as his salary was £100,000.

The remuneration arrangements for this Council's Chief Executive were agreed at Council on 28 November 2012. The nationally agreed pay awards recognise inflation and market conditions and to an extent are performance related. No awards have been given since the Chief Executive was appointed.

It was agreed by Council that the current spot salary arrangement would continue with a starting salary of £100,000. Salary increases would be in line with any nationally agreed pay awards, provided performance is satisfactory. It was also agreed that the limited nature of the national pay awards restricted the ability of a Leader of the Council to recognise the growth of knowledge and experience that a Chief Executive may develop over time. It was also recognised that this can lead to difficulties with retention and attraction of Chief Executives.

Council agreed that an additional reward element of 1% over the nationally agreed pay award could be given each year in recognition of the experience gained and exceptional performance. This award would be consolidated into salary.

When applicable, this would be awarded by the Executive Leader at annual appraisal time, after consultation with other Group Leaders. This established a local agreement outside of the national Chief Officer terms.

The Leader, in consultation with Group Leaders, has agreed to reward the Chief Executive, in line with the local agreement, a 1% award in recognition of his contribution, growth and performance. This will be effective from 1st April 2015 and complies with the Council's Pay Policy Statement and Transparency agenda.

Leisure Contract Extension

The leisure management contract with our contractor, 1Life, is being extended until October 2022 following a review of options which was supported by an independent advisor. The extension of the contract period will now match that of our other leisure management contractor, SLM. SLM operates Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre under the Everyone Active brand.

The new contract negotiated with 1Life is expected to deliver savings of approximately £0.5m annually with no reduction of service to the local community. 1Life will continue to look after the seven local venues it currently manages. These include a swimming pool, two sports centres, a golf course, an athletics track and two theatres. It will also manage the new Cotlandswick Leisure Centre, in London Colney, when it opens on 27 June. In addition, the company will continue to provide various arts and sports programmes for the Council including Special Olympics St Albans and the St Albans Half Marathon.

Increase in Adult Sports Participation

The Council has opened 3 new sports facilities over the last 3 years – Westminster Lodge, Batchwood and Cotlandswick. This supports adult participation in sport and active recreation in the District which rose from 21.9% in 2010/11 to 33% in 2013/14.

In May 2015, Westminster Lodge received its 2 millionth visitor.

Awards Nominations

With 1Life, the Council has been shortlisted for two categories in the UK Active and Matrix Flame Awards 2015. The winners will be announced on 24 June.

These awards are for private, public and voluntary sports and leisure excellence across the sector.

Batchwood Golf Course and Sports Centre, is nominated as 'Health Club of the Year' - Multi-use Award. St Albans Half Marathon, is nominated for the 'Go Outdoors' Award.