# SSDC Transformation Programme – Progress Report

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## Purpose of the Report

1.  This progress report has been prepared in accordance with the Transformation Programme Governance arrangements agreed by Full Council in April 2017 where it was agreed that the District Executive would receive quarterly updates on the progress of the council's Transformation Programme.

## Forward Plan

2.  This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan with an anticipated Committee date of March 2020.

## Public Interest

3.  The Council has been delivering an ambitious programme to totally transform the way it operates to ensure an improved experience for the customers and communities it serves, whilst at the same time reducing the cost to the tax payer.  The programme is transforming the Council into a modern, more efficient, effective and commercially minded organisation. We have radically changed the way our services are structured to support service delivery and we are making more use of digital technology to support new ways of working and delivery.

    Implementation of the agreed business case has delivered;

    - Recurring net annual savings of £2,483,925 from an investment of up to £7,698,155

    - A 'fit for purpose' organisation that will be in a position not only to drive continuous improvement but also to generate additional income to fund and support the council's future priorities.

## Recommendation

4.  The District Executive is asked to note and comment on the report.

## Overview

5.  The Transformation Programme (TP) aims to deliver on South Somerset District Council's strategic objectives, encapsulated in its vision statement: *One Team, Ambitious for South Somerset "Great to work for. Excellent to work with.  Leading the way.  Delivering for our communities"*.

6.  The July 2019 Transformation Programme report invited the District Executive to approve a one off additional resource allocation to support Service Delivery during the extended period of transition. An update on Service Delivery is included in this report at paragraphs 31-48.

7.  The November 2019 Transformation Programme report highlighted progress against a range of non-financial benefits.  Progress continues to be made in these areas, but to avoid repetition they will not be reported again in this document.

8.  **Release 28**.  The November 2019 report mentioned Release 28, a major software upgrade that was being installed at the time of writing.  The release was a success and resolved a number of underlying technical issues.  It enabled package manager (the capability to copy completed process builds between test and live environments); contact filtering (the ability to filter out non-active

accounts from the Contact Manager user interface); incremental improvements to Mobile 360; and other systems reliability and performance issues.

## Customer Service.

9.  **Online Services**. There continues to be a steady 'channel shift' as more customers opt to transact online. Over the period September – December 2019 approximately 72% of available services[1] were completed by self-service via the website.

10. **Public Website**. The public SSDC website is continuously improved in response to customer feedback. As well as enhancements to the look and feel, the functionality on line is continuously improving.

11. In addition to a wealth of searchable information, news and links to third party providers the website gives users the ability to apply and pay for a number of council services and to report environmental issues. The majority of these services are supported by newly designed forms and those that are not (generally lower demand services) will be updated soon.

    - 32 'report it' options are now available online. Most have fully redesigned web forms, can be tracked by the customer through My Account, and automatically kick of 'back office' processes, thereby delivering business efficiencies as well an improved customer experience.

    - Customers can apply for 24 separate services on line. A number of the forms are due to be redesigned, but with the exception of 8 licence application (which require the customer to print off paper forms), all facilitate on-line/paperless application. A number of applications have been fully redesigned leading to both business efficiencies and improved customer journey. Soon after going live online with Single Persons Council Tax Discount, a user successfully made a claim within 7 minutes – from opening the form to receiving the award. The time taken to process such a claim has previously been measured in weeks.

    - 11 out of 12 customer payments can be made on line. This service is being expanded.

12. Work is in hand to reduce to zero any paper transactions.

13. A full list of available online services, with accompany notes, is at Appendix A.

14. **Connect 360 (Contact Management)**. Connect 360 is now being deployed live in a limited capacity. All Customer Connect Officers will need to be trained and familiarised on this new system and the Customer Connect Manager has chosen to delay the full introduction until after the annual garden waste renewals (an annual spike has been made even more problematic by the adoption of an entirely new IT platform by Somerset Waste Partnership). But a small number of CCOs are using Connect 360 to deliver EH and Street Scene to help prepare for the full launch.

15. Testing on Connect 360 has exposed some concerns over the response speed which is being investigated with our digital partner Civica.

16. **My Account**. As at 26 Feb 2020, we have 8,199 account holders[2].

17. A data cleansing system was implemented towards the end of 2019 and this appears to have solved the high rate of account mismatching and duplication that we had been experiencing.

18. **Annual Billing Channel Shift**. We now have sufficient confidence in the account registration and authentication process to use the ongoing round of annual billing for a major channel shift campaign. The bills being sent out are accompanied by information pointing out the cost to the tax payer of annual paper billing and the environmental impact of using so much paper and offering paperless/e-billing as an alternative. Customers will have to be signed up to an account to take up e-billing and so, in line with the messaging, we are designing a paperless authentication process. The aim is

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[1] Services available on both phone and website.
2 20 Feb figure – 7983.

that customers will no longer be sent a print PIN in the post. Instead they will be e-mailed a link to access their account.

19. Potential Benefits:

- A 50% take-up of paperless billing by the targeted audience would result in an annual recurring saving in the order of £18000[3].

- Sending out PIN letters to customers on a 50% sign-up to My Account by the targeted audience would previously cost in the order of £38400[4]. By using the new system of e-mail authentication, this cost will be avoided.

- The non-financial environmental benefits of a significant take up would be considerable. They would be hard to measure but demonstrably consistent with SSDC's environmental strategy.

20. **Localities**. The implementation of fully redesigned EH and Street Scene processes has allowed us to use Mobile 360 operationally, rather than just in a test environment. The results have been good. Where 4G coverage is available the system has provided Locality Officers with mobile functionality. The lack of off-line capability is an identified capability shortfall which is on the Civica development roadmap.

## Service Redesign.

21. **Planning**. Introducing efficiencies to planning processes has been challenging. The business area depends on a mix of human judgement and rules based decision making; it is constrained by legislation and local policy decisions, it relies on a number of interconnected yet distinct IT platforms; it needs a workforce with specific skills and qualifications; and it attracts the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including individual citizens, community groups, agents and building professionals. There is not a simple single fix to modernising planning; rather it requires a range of incremental efficiencies that together will improve the service overall.

- **Process Automation**. Work is ongoing to automate steps in the 'Report a Breach' process. The concept is being developed in the test environment and will be validated soon. Success with this will pave the way similar technical improvements to other planning processes, such as Planning Application. As these steps are proven in operational use further automation will, where technically feasible, be introduced.

- **Electronic Document Management (EDM)**. Improved document management will make the internal movement and handling of planning related information more efficient, thus saving time and freeing up officer capacity. The existing EDM system is deemed fit for purpose and a package of additional training and advice is being rolled out to optimise its use.

- **Communication and Informing**. Greater use is going to be made of the public access portal where stakeholders will be directed to find information. This is in contrast to the current default of the council sending out information to individual stakeholders. The additional effort needed to maintain the portal will be offset by the savings made by not using point to point communications (letters, emails etc), but to be successful it will require behaviour change from all involved. Citizens, community groups, agents and building professionals will have to get used to finding information relevant to them, but in so doing they will enjoy a better service and will free up precious officer resource.

- **Fees and Payments**. We are currently reviewing Planning Fees and Charges to maximise income and support the services we provide. Once agreed by Members, any changes will be

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3 Based on a 50% reduction of scalable costs (postage and envelopes) and a negotiated 25% reduction in non-saleable costs (e.g. print set up).
4 Based on an estimated 96000 potential sign-up, a 48 000 (50%), and a postage rate of 80p.

supported by a fully automated on-line payment service, which is currently under development.

- **Staffing Levels**. Even with the application of technology, much of planning requires human intervention. Recruitment of qualified planning officers is critical and has proved challenging due to the highly competitive market. Indirectly transformation has a role to play in this, as one of the strategic aims of the programme is to make SSDC 'great to work for'. Becoming an employer of choice will help us recruit and retain the talent we need.

- **Policy and Procedure**s. We are currently reviewing a number of policy and procedural areas across Planning to improve the service for our customers, while still ensuring a clear and transparent process. These include the validation guide, Pre-App Service, Fees and Charges and the Scheme of Delegation. We will look to engage with Members to seek input as proposals are developed.

### Revenues

22. **Single Persons Discount**. As mentioned above, a fully integrated Single Persons Discount (SPD) application process has now gone live on the web. In addition to increased customer convenience and speed of response, the processes uses a high degree of automation, integration with the Northgate back office system and a logic engine to reduce, sometimes to zero, the need for human intervention. SPD is a high volume transactions, so as the online claim becomes more widely used, the business efficiencies will be considerable. The success of this development has also proved techniques that will have utility in the redesign of other processes.

23. **Move in/out**. As a new SPD claim often involves a move, the deployed SPD process is being expanded to cater to register a related move too. As well as increasing the efficiency of delivering SPD application, the development will prove the integrations required for a full move in/out report process (not just SPD related). As another high volume transaction, considerable efficiencies stand to be gained from this.

### Environmental Health and Street Scene.

24. High volume EH processes are not only now live on the web, but are also being delivered by via Customer Connect Officers on Connect 360. The information gained, either from a telephone caller or the web form, kicks off processes in the back office, automatically tasking relevant actors and passing information instantaneously.

25. Locality officers are included in a number of EH processes and their work is now being successfully supported by Mobile 360, notwithstanding the continuing off-line capability gap.

### Support Services.

26. More of the Support Service functions are being digitised – initially be redesigning standardised digital forms to replace a wide range of input methods and to save officer time. The forms bring an amount of immediate efficiencies, but are designed in such a way that as EDM and workflow is rolled out these forms can be readily incorporated.

27. Efficiencies are being sought in Finance by reviewing the process of internal payments. A new procurement card provider is being looked into, one that will reduce the need for some of the manual accounting burden.

### Service Delivery Recovery Plan update for Transformation Board: 3 February 2020

28. In recognition of the delays in delivering all the benefits of the transformation programme, District Executive Committee agreed to additional funding to relieve the pressures and reduce service waiting and processing times.

29. Funding was agreed for £494,990 in 2019/20 and £240,230 in 2020/21 to be funded from additional business rate income existing reserves, increased income targets, and a commitment against the 2020/21 budget.

30. In November 2019 an update was given to members on progress. This report gives a further update.

31. The plan provides for additional staffing capacity for a temporary period utilising a mixture of existing staff and where necessary external staff. We have also invested in external support targeted specifically at service backlogs.

32. The full impact of this new resource is starting to take effect, which is reflected in the performance figures.  Overall, there have been improvements across service delivery as a result of this recruitment.

33. In this quarter, the following service delivery improvements have taken place:

34. **Planning**

- Overall services are within standards for determination of planning applications within government targets

- Validation time now reduced from a baseline **of 29 days to 15 working days.**

- The backlog of applications in the system over 8/13 weeks without an extension of time has reduced from **309 to 296 since August. 2019**

- The overall number of **planning applications in the system has been marginally reduced from a baseline of 558 to 522**.

- We are currently using three experienced agency staff to support the existing team in addition to 3 agency staff secured as part of the original funding in order to improve the service to our customers and bring down workloads to a manageable level within the Planning Team

- We have trialled the use of an external agency **who are processing 100 planning applications** which will be removed from the planners' high caseload.

- We are also working with an experienced recruitment agency to analyse employment offers to planners in order to attract permanent team members

- Enforcement cases have increased from 563 to 580. This is because resource has been directed at closing older cases, and being used for priority new cases

- **Extensions of Time have gone down from 90 in August to 43 in the first week of October**

- Several current planning approval procedures namely pre-app protocol, validation and the Scheme of Delegation and Area Committees are being reviewed in order to yield efficiencies.

- All Parish Clerks have been offered 1:1 assistance in navigating the new website.

- There remain significant negative perceptions of customer service delivery while direct access to officers is restricted, and delayed decisions applications causing  personal and financial costs

35. **Benefits**

-  6025 items of backlogged Universal Credit related Council Tax Support work have been outsourced since mid-August 2019. The age of this backlog has reduced from 27 weeks at the end of August to 4 weeks at the end of December. **The average time taken to process new Council Tax Support application forms in this area of work has fallen from a peak of 98 days in October to 38 days in December.**

- With some additional resource we have reduced the **Housing Benefit work backlog from 14 weeks in August to 4 weeks** at the end of December.

- **New Housing Benefit claims and are now being looked at within 5 days of receipt.**

- The average time taken to process new **Housing Benefit application forms has reduced from a peak of 55 days in August to less than 21 days in December.**

- There is still a little way to go to clear the backlog of work completely but anticipate that our performance targets will be met at the end of Q1 2020/21

36. **Revenues**

- Backlog of council tax and business rates reminders and summons were cleared during October and November and a regular programme of issuing them have been maintained since. In all we issued 11,700 reminders and summons between 1st October when backlog clearance started and end of December. We have sent a further 3000 notices in January as at 23/01/20.

- 3860 items of backlogged revenues work have been outsourced. **The age of the backlog of council tax move work items has reduced from 15 weeks in August to 4 weeks at the end of December and now sits at 2 weeks as at 23/01/20.**

- In December, **single person discounts processing has reduced from 13 weeks in August to 3 weeks in December and 2 weeks as at 23/01/20.**

- The backlog of business rates reliefs has been cleared.

- There is still some way to go to clear the backlog of work and return the collection performance to target but good progress continues to be made by the team on both fronts.

- As a result of the headway we have made on reducing the backlog of work outstanding and clearing the backlog of reminder and summons notices the **variation in the council tax collection performance between current year and 2018/19 has narrowed by 26%** from 1.11% in November to 0.82% in December.

37. **Connect (Customer Focused) Team**

- Our average call wait time has **reduced from 5 ½ mins to 4 ½ mins.**

- Our longest wait time was 25 mins during January; this does not occur very often and is predominately over the lunch period when we are still finding demand exceeds our recourses.

- We are currently looking at how we can improve this by introducing staggered working patterns and continue to promote our customer self-serve channels so we can reduce this demand over this period.

- Across the council great progress with backlogs have led to **failure demand phone calls going through the Connect Team reduce from 28% to 5%.**

- Enquiries the team are able to deal with over the phone at the first point of contact has continued to rise from **70% to 87%** due to the investment in training. There remain many calls coming to DDI numbers across the council.

- Customer Connect officers are the first point of contact for any housing queries and now able to help with a range of enquiries. Any that cannot be resolved are referred to the Case team.

- Call backs are working. We received around **600 call back requests** in the last quarter which is half the previous quarter demonstrating more customers as satisfied with the wait they incur on our phones. We have in all cases returned these voicemails within 2 days.

- Over **1700 web enquiries** have been submitted by customers. All these customers have received an initial response from the Customer Connect team within 5 days and in many cases much quicker. We want to improve this response time further in the next quarter to encourage more of your customers to contact us this way.

- The Connect space at Petters House and Community Access Points at Chard and Crewkerne continues to thrive with the **self- serve scanner used over 1300** times during the last quarter.

- Channel shift has reached a high with 72% of customers using our digital channels for transactions instead of the telephone for services that are available through both channels

- There remain significant issues over customer expectations for telephone access where customer expectations are still as they were in the past despite customers having options now that they did not have before i.e. the web and leaving a voice mail.

38. **Housing**

- Our waiting time for housing registering applications has been reduced and is now **down from 29 days in October to 8 days** and a new system for appointments introduced with the Connect team undertaking the initial Triage.

- There is now **a one day wait** to be placed on the housing waiting list against over a month in October last year.

- For changes of circumstances the wait time is now **15 days against a target of 28 days.**

- Overall, by adjusting the way in which work is received and appointments made under the Homelessness Reduction Act the service is achieving **good outcomes in line with service standards.**

39. **Land Charges**

- The length of time taken to process property searches which had **reduced from 28 to 20 days in October is now 3 days** following deployment of additional resources which started on 14/10/19. These results represent a significant step forwards in service standards.

40. **Licensing**

- The length of time taken to process licences for lotteries, street collections and taxis has **reduced from 7 days in August to 3 days** with the injection of additional resources; well within expected service standards.

41. **Environmental Health**

- A backlog of 31 unrated food premises inspections has been outsourced and measures in place to upskill localities team to create in house capacity to manage this going forward.

- A backlog of 26 Environmental permit inspections has been outsourced. We have now successfully recruited to a vacant post providing capacity going forward.

- The 2019 Air Quality report was not complete, however agreement was reached with Defra to submit this as a joint report for 2019/20. This has been outsourced and will be completed. The recruitment to the vacant post will provide capacity to complete this work moving forwards.

- The waiting time for disabled facility grant applications has **reduced from 7 months to 4 months,** equating to 25 applications. Additional resource through Better Care Funding has been effective in this reduction and will continue in place. In addition changes to the tendering of contractors is in progress to increase efficiencies which is expected to make further improvements in the next couple of months.

- All reactive work is currently **within service standards with no backlogs**.

- **12 redesigned processes went live this month** and are expected to deliver increased efficiencies and better customer experience.

**Service Delivery Summary**

42. There has been tremendous effort since last July by the Service Delivery Management Team to deliver the recovery plan as agreed. The Steering Group has met weekly and actions cascaded down to teams. As well as applying the additional resource effectively, constant iterations in ways

of working have been discussed and applied to achieve better outcomes, consistent with demand management and devolving work to the Connect and Case teams.

43. Further improvements are expected in the next quarter with most backlogs cleared. Substantial efforts will continue to be made on percentile improvements in efficiency, channel shift, and new ways of working.

44. Despite the above there remains more work to be completed in order to ensure sustained improvements after summer 2020 when additional resource is removed.

## Financial Implications

45. There are no financial implications as a result of this report. Transformation funding is being monitored against the budget.

## Council Plan Implications

46. Our Council Plan 2016/21 includes an annual action plan for 2019/20 identifying 5 key themes and areas of focus.  The theme most relevant to the transformation programme is;

- Protecting core services

Within this, priority project 1 is to complete and fully realise the benefits of Transformation and implement the Commercial Strategy

## Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

47. The move towards more online transactions, particularly in areas such as council tax e-billing, results in significant reductions in paper usage, will have a positive environmental effect.  As well as the actual saving in paper and consumables, the council will be seen to be acting in a more environmentally responsible manner.

48. Though not yet measured, it is clear that agile working is allowing more officers to work from home when appropriate, so reducing vehicle usage for commuting.

## Equality and Diversity Implications

49.  There are no implications arising from this report.

50. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken in 2017 prior to commencing the selection process for the repositioning of roles in the organisation.  This deemed there was no inequitable impact for any group as a result of the reorganisation proposals as sufficient measures had been taken to address any potential areas of risk.

## Privacy Impact Assessment

51. There are no implications arising from this report.

## Background Papers

Quarterly reports to District Executive

**CUSTOMER SERVICES AVAILABLE ON SSDC WEBSITE**

| Service | Status |
|---|---|
| **Report Something** | |
| Abandoned vehicle | Redesigned webform with back office automation. |
| Accumulation of waste | |
| Bin collection missed | |
| Broken glass | |
| Damage to Council property | |
| Dead animal | |
| Dog attack or dangerous dog | |
| Dog fouling | |
| Dog found or stray dog | |
| Dog lost | |
| Dog mess bin issue | |
| Drug litter | |
| Fly-posting | |
| Fly-tipping | |
| Graffiti | |
| Grass requires cutting | |
| Leaves require sweeping | |
| Litter | |
| Litter bin issue | |
| Nuisance light, noise, odour, smoke, bonfire | |
| Overgrown hedge | |
| Overgrown shrub, flower bed | |
| Tree issue | |
| Vehicle parked on grass verge | |
| Vomit or human faeces | |
| Drains or sewer issue | Customer is directed to Wessex Water on-line reporting page. |
| Benefits change in circumstances | Redesigned webform to improve customer experience.  Further automation of back office to follow |
| Council tax change in circumstances | Existing online form. To be redesigned. |
| Moving in, out or within the area | Process redesign in progress |
| Appeal housing benefit decision | Existing online form. To be redesigned. |
| Upload evidence to support benefits application | Redesigned webform. |
| Bereavement | Service available via .gov Tell Us Once. To be redesigned to enable integration with SSDC systems. |
| **Apply for Something** | |
| Council tax discount or exemption | Redesigned SPD process with full integration. Other discounts WIP |
| Housing benefit and council tax support | Redesigned. Fully integrated form now available on web. |
| Careline | Customer is directed to Careline website to complete application. |

| Service | Status |
|---|---|
| Homefinder | Customer is directed to Homefinder website to complete application. |
| Backdated benefits | Existing online form. To be redesigned. |
| Business rate relief | Existing online. To be redesigned. |
| Planning permission | Application made via .gov.uk Planning Portal |
| Discharge planning conditions | Application made via .gov.uk Planning Portal |
| Report a planning breach | Redesign underway. |
| Appeal planning decision | Application made via .gov.uk Planning Portal |
| Clinical waste collection | Redesign complete. Integrated with SWP. Waiting for final test. |
| Bulky waste collection | Customer is directed to SWP website to complete application |
| Waste container | Existing online form. Redesign underway. |
| Sandbags | Redesigned webform. |
| Temporary event notice | Existing online form.  To be redesigned. |
| Personal licence (link to printable form) | Low volume process.  To be redesigned as online forms. |
| Premises licence (link to printable form) | |
| Alcohol and Entertainment licences (link to multiple printable forms) | |
| Animal licences (links to multiple printable forms) | |
| Gaming and Gambling licences (links to multiple printable forms) | |
| Scrap metal licences (links to multiple printable forms) | |
| Street trading licences (links to multiple printable forms) | |
| Taxis and private hire licences (links to multiple printable forms) | |
| Apply for vacancies, placements and volunteering opportunities | Application made via email. |
| **Make a payment** | |
| Building control copy charges | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |
| Building regulation fee | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |
| Planning application (for paper application) | Existing online form integrated with payment app. Online applications payable on planning portal. |
| Planning pre-application advice | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |
| Business rates | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |
| Council tax | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |
| Car park season ticket | Link to SSDC MiPermit Portal. |
| Parking fine | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |

| Service | Status |
|---|---|
| Council invoice | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |
| Garden waste sacks & sticker | Redesigned application and payment process. Fully integrated process now available via web. |
| Pest control | Existing online form integrated with payment app. |
| Street naming and numbering | Link to paper form. |
| **Search for something** | |
| Planning application | Available on SSDC via SSDC website |
| Information about your area | |
| Check council tax banding | |
| Business services, advice and support | |
| Commercial land and property | |
| News and events | |
| Information and links to council services, parks and entertainment centres | |