

Part I

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WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 MARCH 2023  
REPORT OF GARAGES TASK AND FINISH PANEL

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GARAGES TASK AND FINISH PANEL

**1 Executive Summary**

1.1 This report outlines the recommendations arising from the Garage Management Task and Finish Panel (T&F).

**2 Recommendation(s)**

2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to acknowledge and approve the recommendations set out in in this report. The recommendations are as follows:

- Review the pricing structure of the garages (already taken onto Council as part of the 2023/24 Budget)
- That a marketing strategy should be created and appropriately resourced
- Further system improvements should be made, where possible in the areas highlighted in section 3.10
- Complete the site review underway and consider alternative suitable use where appropriate
- Ensure repairs are tracked from request to completion (implemented)

**3.0 Explanation**

3.1 At the beginning of the municipal year Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) used a scoring matrix to decide on the topics they wished to scrutinise in the coming year. Garage Management came out as a High Priority topic following this exercise.

3.2 A scoping document for Garage Management was agreed at the OSC meeting on 27 September 2022 and it was agreed that a Task and Finish Panel be set up to look at this.

3.3 Membership of the Task and Finish Panel was later agreed as Councillors M. Holloway (Chair), J. Cragg, S. McNamara, J.P Skoczylas and S. Thusu.

3.4 The first meeting of the Panel was held on 29 November 2022. At this meeting the Panel agreed the scope of the report.

3.5 The overall aim of the scrutiny was: “Ensuring the council is obtaining the best possible income from its garages, and that the council is adequately maintaining the stock and responding to customer repair requests in a timely manner.”

3.6 The objectives were agreed as:

- To investigate the volume of repair requests received by the council
- To explore how repairs are responded to and whether repairs are carried out in line with contractual arrangements
- To consider the complaints against the service and whether there are any common themes to upheld complaints.
- To explore whether the council is maximising rental from its stock

3.7 The panel requested that the following be explored:

- To look at rental comparisons across Herts, including private ones, and how ours compare to sizes of commercial offerings
- To look at how the online form can be improved, including possibility of adding a waiting list number
- To look at options for future marketing of garages.

### **3.8 Pricing**

3.8.1 Officers presented the results of a benchmarking exercise with neighbouring Councils and local private hire. Welwyn Hatfield was cheaper in comparison to the other authorities, in some instances by quite some amount and far cheaper than local storage units (**Appendix A**).

3.8.2 The current rental income for garages in the borough is on average £56.33 per month. This compares to other Herts local authorities where the costs are on average between £55 - £68pm.

3.8.3 There is scope to review the pricing of garage rental in the borough to bring this more in line with other authorities - but we would encourage officers to be mindful of the financial challenges facing many residents in the borough when exploring this.

### **3.9 Marketing**

3.9.1 Officers highlighted one challenge was with the marketing of the garage service to residents in Welwyn Hatfield. While it's encouraging to see some of the steps outlined in the reports to members, we recommend that a full and comprehensive 2023/24 marketing plan be created to highlight garage availability. This should be given appropriate time and resources from the communications team to support.

### **3.10 Systems, Processes and Technology**

3.10.1 The T&F group thought that the technology and systems used by the team should be reviewed.

3.10.2 Officers highlighted that a large amount of application documentation was paper based, and this made it difficult to effectively review this information. The team

should work to ensure this is digitised and all recorded in the same place and easily accessible.

3.10.3 We were presented with a series of improvements to the system that the garages team are currently seeking to implement - we support these initiatives and believe they will make the process much more transparent for those seeking to rent a unit, and for the team to operate.

These were:

- Online applications option – Completed (option now available on the form when applying for a garage).
- Select a particular garage – 6 to 12 Months. With this people can choose vacant garages which will help streamline the process.
- Provide a waiting list position – 6 to 12 Months.
- Waiting List amalgamation – 6 to 9 months. Currently working on putting everything together from the old system to the new system. The team are working on how to ensure people who are on the waiting list will remain in their current position.
- 100% applications processed into Jadu – 6 Months. Will provide the team with email addresses which is important so that the tenant can be contacted with updates and important information. The information will then all be in one place.

3.10.4 Officers will seek to explore these in more detail with a view to implementation, should these be possible within the system. This may require development work which will be prioritised in line with strategic priorities.

### **3.11 Use of the Land / Occupancy Rates**

3.11.1 Officers highlighted that some garage areas are consistently difficult to rent, with little to no demand. We appreciate this carries a cost to the council to manage the upkeep of these garages.

3.11.2 Pending the outcome of the marketing exercise, the Council should conduct a review of the use of these sites to establish whether the council is getting the most out of them and if there is a more suitable alternative use.

3.11.3 Officers have advised that a rationalisation strategy is being developed for approval at Cabinet. This could include disposals to the HRA for social housing or alternatively for private development.

### **3.12 Repairs**

3.12.2 A snapshot of repairs leading up to the T&F panel meeting is contained within **Appendix B**.

3.12.3 The recommendation here was to ensure that repairs were tracked from request to completion. Since migrating the existing systems onto Orchard, all repairs are

now tracked, and quality checked by the teams Senior Building Surveyor and discussed during weekly contractor meetings.

### **3.13 Complaints**

3.13.1 The garages team provide a good service to the council and provides the council with a good source of revenue. This is backed up the sparse amount of complaints received, please see **Appendix C** for information. Based on this no further recommendations were made in this area.

#### **Implications**

#### **4. Legal Implications**

4.1 There are no Legal Implications arising from this report.

#### **5. Financial Implication(s)**

5.1 The marketing strategy will aim at increasing occupancy, in turn increasing the income generated from the assets and support the council in delivering balanced budgets in future years.

5.2 Following discussions with the panel on fees and charges, a new charging structure was proposed in the budget which was agreed by full council, and delivers increased income for 2023/24.

5.3 The forthcoming rationalisation strategy will ensure the council is getting best value from its assets.

5.4 The marketing strategy, once developed, is planned to be delivered from existing budgets.

#### **6. Risk Management Implications**

6.1 There are no Risk Management Implications arising from this report.

#### **7. Communication**

7.1 There will be a continued requirement for communicating changes such as rental increases as well as marketing the sites once the Marketing Plan has been completed.

#### **8. Security & Terrorism Implication(s)**

8.1 There are no Security and Terrorism Implications arising from this report.

#### **9. Procurement Implication(s)**

9.1 There are no Procurement Implications arising from this report.

#### **10 Climate Change Implication(s)**

10.1 There are no climate change implications arising as a result of the recommendations in the report.

**11. Human Resources Implication(s)**

11.1 There are no Human Resources Implications arising from this report.

**12. Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)**

12.1 There are no Health and Wellbeing Implications arising from this report.

**13. Link to Corporate Priorities**

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to all of the Council's 5 Priorities.

**14. Equalities and Diversity**

14.1 An EqlA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

## Appendix A

# Garage Rental Income

- **5089** Garages in the General Fund
- The current WHBC rental income is on average **£56.33** a month for a garage
- Comparison with other Herts Councils found current fees for Garage rental range between **£55 - £68**
- WHBC charges at the bottom end for one garage (£56.33)

Authority	Council Tenant	Non Council tenant
WHBC	£ 56.33	£ 56.33
Stevenage	£ 54.16	£ 65.00
Settle (North Herts)	£ 46.02	£ 55.25
St Albans	£ 51.95	£ 62.35
Dacorum	£ 56.98	£ 68.38
Network Homes (East Herts)	discount is mentioned	£ 58.00



## “Self-Store” options within Hertfordshire

Unit Type	Price per week (inc VAT)	Price after 3 months (25% discount)
125 sqft STORAGE (3 bedrooms)	£50.00	£37.50
105 sq ft (3 bedrooms)	£90.00 / £45.00	£67.50
140 sq ft (4 bedrooms)	£120.00 / £60.00	£90.00

125 SQFT	105 SQFT	140 SQFT
Ground Floor	£47.81	£95.82



## Appendix B

# Repairs

142 repairs reported in October 2022

137 completed

75% completed within 1 week

18% completed within 2 weeks

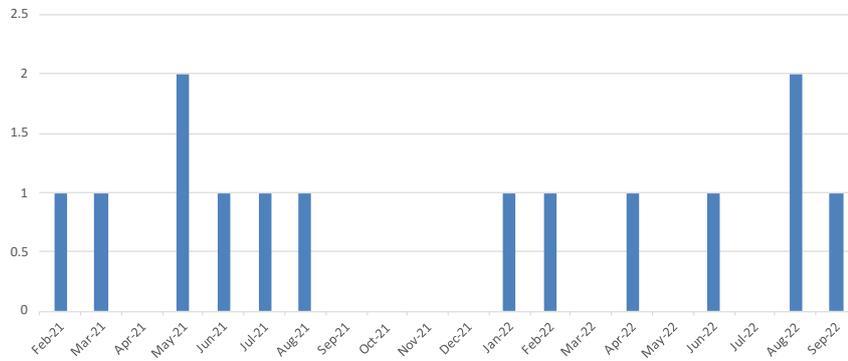
5% completed within 3 weeks

2% outstanding



## Appendix C

# Complaints



13 complaints over 20 months

- 7 Not Upheld
- 4 Upheld
- 1 Partially Upheld
- 1 Not defined as complaint

