

Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

- R P Cooke - Resources Portfolio
- I D Fordham - Environment Portfolio
- R Kenney - Deputy Leader and Town Centres Regeneration Portfolio
- G P K Pardesi - Leisure Portfolio
- A N Pearce - Climate Action and Nature Recovery Portfolio
- A F Reid - Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

Also present - Councillors B McKeown and A J Sandiford

Officers in attendance:

- T Clegg - Chief Executive
- C Forrester - Deputy Chief Executive - Resources
- G Stott - Deputy Chief Executive - Place
- J Aupers - Head of Business Support and Assurance
- A Yendole - Planning Policy Manager
- W Conaghan - Press and Communications Manager
- J Dean - Democratic Services Officer

#### **CAB1 Minutes**

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2026 as published on 10 April 2026 were agreed as a correct record.

#### **CAB2 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Hood.

### **CAB3 New Local Plan - Notice of Intention to Commence, and Scoping and Engagement Consultations**

Received a report for Members to consider progressing the New Local Plan 2025-2045 following publication of Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 and subsequent Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 that came into force on 25 March 2026 together with the latest Government policy and guidance and recommending:-

- publishing a New Local Plan timetable to come into effect from 3 June 2026, replacing the Local Development Scheme published in March 2025;
- progressing with a 'Scoping the Issues and Early Participation', the 'Communication and Engagement Strategy', and 'Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report' consultations in June and July 2026.
- publishing a Notice of Intention to Commence with the Local Plan process and the Notice of Scoping Consultation on 3 June 2026, and subsequently proceed to Gateway 1 of the new Local Plan system by 30 October 2026.

The Cabinet Member, Economic Development and Planning Portfolio, introduced the report by reading from the following prepared statement:-

'Tonight I'm asking you to approve the consultations for our Local Plan, and the timetable that follows. Early consultation is absolutely key to the new approach to this, and I propose we agree to launch this within the next few weeks, as well as the approve other recommendations around activities and delegation.

This includes making any minor and factual amendments to the booklets we've attached here as deemed necessary prior to formal publication, as per paragraph 2.4 of the report.

A Local Plan sets the vision for our communities for the next twenty years but more than that - our decisions will impact the landscape for much longer and we must consult with our residents and key stakeholders early enough to allow for real decisions to be meaningful.

The new process is a very big change from what went on before. The previous Preferred Options, published in 2022, resulted in an extremely large amount of contributions during consultation, and was unable to proceed as it was. This new process pushes the need for proper, deep, and quality evidence much earlier and this is what the team have been doing since I announced the decision to restart the process in March 2025.

Last Autumn I worked with the MP for Stafford, Leigh Ingham, to seek ministerial support to make all this faster. We secured extra government funding to get this evidence more quickly and reports produced in time to enable us, today, to approve this report and revised timeline. My thanks to Leigh for her support on this. The Local Plan is the key way we give our residents choice about development and preservation. Getting this done faster is vital and very welcome. The whole borough benefits from this.

The first consultation is called rather sensibly “scoping the issues and early participation’. This makes sure we have the issues laid out properly. Front and centre of this is that we recognize there is a climate emergency and need our Local Plan to reflect this. Secondly we have unique places and landscapes, and need to protect. Then we have issues and themes around quality of life, affordable homes, traffic and transport, economic prosperity, and the vital infrastructure that makes all this work. We’re asking you all to help make sure we have all of issues right, so we can be sure our vision for Stafford in twenty years time is clear.

The second consultation is around our communication and engagement strategy. This is absolutely vital to our residents and communities. This is your say. I strongly encourage all residents to look out for this, as we want to hear from you as well as the dozens of other bodies listed on pages 31-33 of the agenda. We need to hear from you and this document says when, where, and how we’ll do that. We are committing to user-friendly policy documents, and particularly want to hear from groups who may normally not have their voice heard. This is the key way your views can be heard - please get involved, and tell us how we need to get you involved. We are here to listen.

The third is the “Sustainability Appraisal”. This appraisal includes our natural world, such as biodiversity, landscape, soil quality, water, wildlife, and so on. It also covers human aspects - health and welfare, air quality, cultural heritage, architecture, and the ways we measure these things. Then it needs to tie these all together and not treat them as separate silos or tick boxes – and it needs to consider forecasts, climate change being the biggest and most important of these. Do not underestimate the importance of this report. We have to get this right, and by consulting on it we aim to give our Local Plan a firm foundation of evidence that allows solid decisions to be made that cannot be reasonably challenged. I ask all consultees to help us get this right.

As part of today’s decision making, we are also formally agreeing to publish our notice of intent and proceed to the so-called “gateway 1” in the autumn. We then have 30 months to complete the process.

I want to take the time to thank the entire team and the leadership within the council that brought us here. There’s plenty of work to do, but we wouldn’t be here, now, without the hard work and attention both to detail and to our cabinet’s vision that this team demonstrates every day’.

Councillor Reid concluded his comments by recommending that the proposals as set out in paragraph 2 be approved.

Cabinet echoed Councillor Reid's comments in thanking Officers for their efforts in this area of work and subsequently voted on the recommendation, which was declared to be carried.

RESOLVED:- that the proposals of the Cabinet Member, Economic Development and Planning Portfolio be approved as follows:

- (a) the New Local Plan 2025-2045 timetable, as set out in paragraph 5.6 of the report, based on the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 and associated guidance, to be submitted to Government and brought into effect on 3 June 2026 be approved (to be reviewed at Gateway 1 stage) and the Head of Economic Development and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, be authorised to make minor amendments to the New Local Plan timetable going forward and update the Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as appropriate;
- (b) the New Local Plan 2025-2045 Notice of Intention to Commence (Regulation 19) with the Local Plan process and the Notice of Scoping Consultation (Regulation 20) on the New Local Plan, be approved, published and submitted to Government on 3 June 2026, as set out appendix 1 of the report;
- (c) the New Local Plan 2025-2045 'Scoping the Issues and Early Participation', the 'Communication and Engagement Strategy', and 'Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report' consultations be approved for public consultation from 8 June until 28 July 2026, as referenced in the booklets appended to the report, together with the supporting documentation.
- (d) the Head of Economic Development and Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, be authorised to finalise consultation material and make factual amendments prior to consultation, to process representations received to the 'Scoping the Issues and Early Participation' the 'Communication and Engagement Strategy', and 'Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report' consultations, and submit the self assessment requirements and proceed to Gateway 1 of the New Local Plan process.

#### **CAB4 Review of the Revenues and Benefits Service Debt Collection Process**

Received the report of the Task and Finish Group which reviewed the policies and processes involved in the Collection and Recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates.

The Cabinet Member, Resources Portfolio, introduced the report noting the detail as set out in paragraphs 2, 3, 5 and the associated appendix.

Councillor Cooke concluded his comments by thanking Officers for their efforts in producing the report and recommended that the proposals as set out in paragraph 2 be approved.

The Cabinet subsequently voted on the recommendation, which was declared to be carried.

**RESOLVED:-** that the proposals of the Cabinet Member, Resources Portfolio be approved as follows:

- (a) the report be noted and accepted;
- (b) no significant changes be made to the Billing, Collection and Recovery Policy at this time;
- (c) any statutory changes to the Council Tax and Business Rate collection process be included in an updated policy, and be reported to Cabinet, as necessary;
- (d) Officers continue to identify those debts which are irrecoverable and when necessary, process them for write-off in accordance with the Council's Constitution;
- (e) the project to review older debts be continued into the 2026-27 financial year and that the effectiveness of continued action be reviewed on a 6-monthly basis by the Section 151 Officer.

CHAIR