



Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford

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Dear Members

Cabinet

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held on **Thursday 6 March 2025** at **6.30pm** in the **Craddock Room, Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

Members are reminded that contact officers are shown at the top of each report and members are welcome to raise questions etc in advance of the meeting with the appropriate officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "I. Curran".

Head of Law and Governance

CABINET - 6 MARCH 2025

Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of 20 February 2025 as circulated and published on 21 February 2025
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Councillors' Question Time (if any)
- 4 Proposals of the Cabinet Members (as follows):-

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(i) Corporate Plan 2025-26 to 2027-28	4 - 40
(b) RESOURCES PORTFOLIO	
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Report contains information relating to an individual, which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual and information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).	
(c) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING PORTFOLIO	
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Membership

Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey

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

Agenda Item 4(a)i

Corporate Plan 2025-26 to 2027-28

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Report of:	Head of Transformation and Assurance
Portfolio:	The Leader of the Council

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the new Corporate Plan for 2025-26 to 2027-28 and the supporting priority delivery plans (PDPs).
- 1.2 The report also sets out the results of the consultation on the draft corporate plan.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council approval of the:
 - (i) The Corporate Plan 2025-26 to 2027-28; and
 - (ii) The outline Priority Delivery Plans for 2025-26 to 2027-28.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.3 The adoption of a corporate plan, provides clarity in what the Council is seeking to achieve and allows for a framework to be put in place to deliver this and for performance to be reported against it.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The current corporate plan ran from 2021-24 and was extended for 12 months pending a review of priorities and production of a new plan.
- 3.2 There has been considerable change both locally and nationally since the current plan was developed. A full review has been undertaken of progress over the last few years and consideration given to aspirations for the future. This has been used to frame the proposed vision, priorities and objectives for the new corporate plan.

- 3.2 Consultation has taken place with the community and our stakeholders to seek their views on the proposed vision, priorities and objectives for the new Corporate Plan.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The process of producing a new corporate plan will determine the Council's priorities for the next three years.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The Council's current Corporate Plan was developed four years ago. Whilst good progress has been made in the delivery of our priorities, there has been considerable change both locally and nationally.
- 5.2 Good corporate planning will ensure that the Council has a clear framework within which actions can be taken and which achieve the greatest impact on agreed priorities and objectives within the resources available. This is increasingly important due to the challenges the Council is facing.
- 5.3 Four overarching priorities are proposed which focus on:
- the economy of the Borough;
 - the health and wellbeing of residents;
 - climate change and our environment; and
 - being an effective Council.
- 5.4 The priorities are supported by a number of objectives that set out what the Council is aiming to achieve, how we will deliver these and how we will measure our performance. The new corporate plan is set out in detail in **APPENDIX 1**.
- 5.5 In order to performance manage the delivery of the corporate plan, priority delivery plans (PDPs) will be used. These plans will set out the key actions/milestones and target dates for delivery. A high level PDP for each priority setting out the key milestones for the next three years is attached at **APPENDIX 2**. A more detailed PDP will be produced annually setting out the actions to be delivered in the forthcoming financial year. A range of key performance indicators (KPIs) are also included in the corporate plan. Performance in delivering the annual PDPs and the KPIs will be reported quarterly to the Cabinet and the relevant Scrutiny Committees.
- 5.6 A consultation exercise has been undertaken to seek the views of the public and our stakeholders on the Council's priorities. This was undertaken via a survey on the Council's website and was promoted through the press and social media.
- 5.7 In total, there were 68 responses to the consultation. Overall respondents were supportive of the proposed vision and priorities. In particular, respondents are:

- The Economy - supportive of the work to transform the town centre, but would also like to see support for the outlying towns and villages, the rural economy and small/independent businesses;
- Communities and Wellbeing - supportive of the 'safe and secure places to live and work and facilities to maintain a healthy outlook' but expressed concerns about the volume of house building and the current leisure contract.
- Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment - supportive of improving the appearance of the borough (clean, tidy and well maintained open spaces) but expressed concerns about the Council's ability to improve climate change.
- Well Managed Council - felt this should be a given.

The results of the consultation are set out in **APPENDIX 3** and includes a representative selection of the comments made.

5.8 Whilst it has not been possible to take on board all of the comments made, we have:

- changed the priority from being a well managed council to an effective Council
- included an action to review the current leisure contract;
- added in an objective and actions to support future consultation on key projects; and
- added reference to the Government's proposals for the restructuring of the local government and the work associated with this.

5.9 Feedback was received around the proposed Climate Change priority. The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and is working towards Net Zero. To enable this to happen Climate Change considerations must be an important factor in the way that we operate. Whilst the tangible benefits of our actions may not be seen for many years, we have a duty to future generations to take this issue seriously and act now.

5.10 A number of the consultation comments referred to issues that the Council has no or little control over; for example:

- house building - the Council is given targets by the government for new housing building which have to be delivered; and
- roads, transport, flooding social care, health care are the responsibility of other organisations (the County Council, NHS and the Environment Agency).

- 5.11 Since the corporate plan was drafted and the consultation launched the Government has announced plans to restructure local government which will see the creation of unitary councils and the end of district, borough and county councils. The corporate plan has been updated to make reference to this has and an action included to develop a plan to respond to the proposals and prepare for a smooth transition. The corporate plan has also been reduced to a three year plan to reflect the target date of 2028 for the new Councils in the 2nd phase.

6.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications as this stage in the development of the new corporate plan. A number of the proposed priorities/objectives have ongoing schemes for delivery which already have budget allocated to them.

Where new projects come forward as part of the development of the delivery plans, these will need to be costed and consideration given to whether this can be accommodated withing existing budgets or whether additional funding will be required.

6.2 Legal

The Local Government Act 1999 requires local authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (the Best Value Duty). Regard must be had to the statutory guidance which advises authorities to set clear and achievable priorities, to review corporate plans to ensure they are current and realistic, and to ensure resources are used effectively considering the resources available.

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

The Council's Strategic Risk Register sets out the risks the Council faces in delivering its priorities. This will be updated to reflect the new priorities in due course.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken as part of the delivery of the actions set out in the Corporate Plan and the supporting priority delivery plans, particularly those which relate to the development of policies and strategies.

6.6 Climate Change

Climate change is a priority for the Council and this is recognised in the corporate plan.

6 Appendices

Appendix 1: Corporate Plan

Appendix 2: Priority Delivery Plans (PDP)

Appendix 2a - Prosperous Economy PDP

Appendix 2b - Communities and Wellbeing PDP

Appendix 2c - Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment PDP

Appendix 2d - Effective Council PDP

Appendix 3: Summary of Consultation Responses

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

None

Contact Officer:	Judith Aupers
Telephone Number:	01543 464411
Ward Interest:	All
Report Track:	Cabinet 6 March 2025 Council 8 April 2025
Key Decision:	Yes

Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28

Foreword from the Leader:

Stafford Borough Council has been hard at work starting ambitious projects to improve economic success, environmental sustainability, and healthy living within the area. These schemes range from the completion of the Westbridge Park play area in Stone to the start of the transformation of Stafford town centre.

The improvement of our town centres is of the highest importance. We are now seeing our major regeneration plans for the County Town starting to take shape. We will be working closely with partners, such as Stafford College and local businesses, to help regenerate our town centres, and will be seeking the views of the public for our new developments.

We expect the environment and sustainability to be at the heart of all new investment schemes in the borough.

We want to encourage healthier lifestyles taking a 'prevention is better than cure approach' to health issues. Good housing is essential for the wellbeing of those living here. Working with others we will oversee the building of much needed new affordable and social housing. We will build council houses again while ensuring other social housing providers improve the quality of existing properties and the building of new accommodation.

It will be an extremely challenging time for local authorities with proposed changes from the Government that could see Stafford Borough Council merged with neighbouring authorities over the next few years - but we will be not lose sight of achieving our goals.

So, to achieve all that we have set out to do, it is essential our finances are sound, not only now but for future years - allowing us to continue delivering the great services to our communities, day in, and day out.

We will restore pride back to the County Town and Borough.

Councillor Aidan T.A. Godfrey

Leader of the Council

Our Vision:

To be an effective Council that promotes a growing economy, strong, healthy communities and a sustainable environment.

Priorities:

Our vision is underpinned by 4 interlinking priorities that reinforce each other

Our priorities are:

- Prosperous Economy
- Communities and Wellbeing
- Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment
- Effective Council

Employment, a safe and attractive environment, good quality housing, community safety and an active population all play a huge part in achieving a prosperous and thriving local economy, as well as being vital to good health and wellbeing and protecting our natural environment.

Context:

In determining the Council's priorities we have considered the Government's initial priorities for local government which are:

- New house building targets
- Creation of new towns and housing affordability
- Speed up and streamline the planning process
- Up-to-date local plans (national planning policy framework)
- Private rented sector - abolition of no-fault evictions
- Building Safety
- Ending homelessness
- Devolution proposals.

These will be kept under review and we will adapt our corporate plan where necessary.

Core Principles/How we will deliver:

We have identified a number of core principles which will underpin our approach to delivering the corporate plan and our priorities:

- Put our residents / customers at the centre of everything we do.
- Climate change to be considered in all of our decisions and embedded in our service delivery.
- Show leadership in our communities.
- Improve service delivery, through the effective use of technology.
- Promote good governance - integrity, accountability and transparency.
- Promote a culture of one team that gets things done.

Partnership Working:

The Council works in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary organisations to deliver our priorities and objectives. We work closely with:

- Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, businesses and education providers such as Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group to improve skills and create business growth;
- The County Council and Integrated Care Partnership on health and care issues;
- Central government via the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Homes England, housing associations, housing developers and support providers to deliver new and better houses and supported accommodation;
- The voluntary sector and community groups whose role is critical in providing support to communities;
- Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to promote community safety; and
- the Environment Agency, English Heritage and voluntary bodies to protect and conserve our natural environment.

The Borough Council works closely with the other district and borough Councils in Staffordshire, the County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council and the Leader sits on the Staffordshire Leaders' Board.

Profile of the Borough Council:

Stafford Borough Council is a democratically accountable body with 40 elected Councillors. Local elections to these positions occur every four years.

The Council has unique responsibilities defined by Parliament for delivering a range of services, functions and responsibilities. These are quite extensive by their nature but the core responsibilities include:

- Planning Authority - the Council determines planning policy for the Borough via Local Plans and also makes decisions on most planning applications.
- Strategic Housing and Homelessness duty - the Council has a responsibility to plan the housing needs of the Borough; to approve a Homelessness strategy and deal with individual cases to assess whether they are homeless and what support they are entitled to.
- Billing Authority - the Council is responsible for collecting Council Tax and Business Rates on behalf of all public bodies in the Borough.
- Licensing Authority - the Council is responsible for the licensing of taxis, food outlets, alcohol outlets, tattoo parlours, street trading etc.
- Waste Collection Authority - the Council is responsible for collecting domestic waste and recycling materials from every residential building in the Borough.

The Council also undertakes a range of optional responsibilities where there is no requirement in law to do so. These activities are aimed at promoting economic prosperity, community wellbeing and safety in the Borough. Examples of these include:

- The funding / provision of leisure, sporting and cultural facilities and services.
- Provision of support to businesses to help them to grow and expand
- Funding advice services such as Citizen Advice.
- Floral displays in town centres and grass cutting
- Provision of CCTV service
- Maximising opportunities for public and private investment

Staffordshire County Council is responsible for social care provision, libraries, education and roads/highways etc.

Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy

Why this is important:

Stafford Borough has a strong economic base and plays a major role in the growth of the wider Staffordshire economy and beyond.

Stafford is a major economic hub and has seen significant investment and growth over the last decade with major investors and businesses attracted to the area due to the availability of sites, infrastructure, affordability, and quality of life. The Borough is home to over 5,000 businesses, employing around 70,000 people and is Staffordshire's largest and most populous borough covering around 230 square miles and with a population of 138,670.

The Council has an important role to play through its Economic development and planning functions in creating the right conditions for economic growth and prosperity for its residents.

Over the last few years, the Council has secured a significant amount of Government funding to support its regeneration plans, with funding secured from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support economic growth projects, Future High Street Fund to deliver the transformation of Stafford town centre including the acquisition and demolition of the former Co-op and Guildhall shopping centre, the award of funding to unlock the development of the Stafford Station Gateway, releasing land for housing and commercial opportunities and investment in a new state of art Institute of Technology.

The new Government has identified house building as a major priority and has announced reforms to the planning system, with the restoration of mandatory housing targets for local authorities.

Going forward, Stafford Borough will need to develop a new Local Plan and plan for an increase in house building and new employment opportunities. With more homes comes greater opportunities for inward investment and demand for education, employment and leisure facilities and a continued need to transform and regenerate our town centres, ensuring that they are vibrant and diverse, and cater for a wider range of opportunities than just retail.

There is a need for the Council to work in partnership to support our local businesses to grow including businesses in our main towns, rural areas and key service villages and to continue to position the Borough as an excellent place to invest, to create new high quality and well-paid jobs for our local residents and in particular for our younger population.

To support the Council's ambitious agenda, it is vitally important that the Council continues to deliver well run and efficient services, and it is a priority to improve the performance of the planning service, with a focus on providing high levels of customer service and re-positioning of the service from being seen as a regulator to an enabler of growth.

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

1. A prosperous economy where the workforce has the skills to drive growth to benefit our communities.
2. Vibrant town centres that are the focus for economic, cultural and community life.
3. Ensure new housing is well designed and built in the right place.

How we will deliver this:

1. Complete the delivery of our ambitious regeneration schemes to transform Stafford town centre.
2. Work with our partners to develop a new Economic Growth Strategy with a compelling and dynamic vision for the future of the Borough's economy.
3. Promote the Borough as an excellent place to do business and invest.
4. Develop a pipeline of economic projects that attract funding from the private sector and government investment.
5. Deliver planning services that identify sites for homes, including affordable housing, with good infrastructure, land for employment, protection of our green spaces and policies that reduce the impact of climate change.

How we will measure our performance:

Regeneration
Employment rate
Town centre vacancy rate
Number of housing completions
Planning Services
Major Planning Applications determined within time
Non-major Planning Applications determined within time
Major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined
Non-major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined

Priority 2 - Communities and Wellbeing**Why this is important:**

Stafford Borough is an attractive, relatively affluent place to live, but there are pockets of deprivation and disadvantage where health inequalities exist and crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) is higher than it should be.

The population is ageing, bringing with it new challenges for agencies to address. Healthy life expectancy is unequal, depending where in the Borough you live and the circumstances you live in.

Homelessness has increased over the past 5 years as housing is increasingly unaffordable, in short supply and people are experiencing multiple support needs that make sustaining a tenancy challenging. Despite historic strong delivery of affordable housing, that is now reducing as housing associations face a more financially challenging environment with increased obligations to their tenants.

Recent years have seen Stafford Borough welcoming and resettling those who have fled conflict. Sufficient suitable accommodation will continue to be needed to support formal resettlement schemes and asylum requirements. Working with partners to support cohesive and safe communities is essential.

The Borough benefits from of a wide range of community groups and voluntary organisations that provide support, friendship and advice to residents. Their contribution is recognised and highly valued by all partners.

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

1. A safe and secure place to live for local people, including affordable housing for those who need it.
2. The opportunity for local people and communities to enjoy healthy lifestyles by providing good leisure and cultural services.
3. A reduction in health inequalities.
4. A safe and cohesive Borough

How we will deliver this:

1. Work towards delivering social housing that contributes to meeting the needs of the local population as recognised by the emerging Housing Strategy.
2. Reduce and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, by delivering the commitments set out in the new Homelessness Strategy 2025 and commit to reducing the number of households in B&B accommodation.
3. Review of Leisure, Culture and Heritage provision and ensure it promotes healthy empowered communities.
4. Agree a Community Wellbeing Strategy setting out delivery of community safety priorities and, how health will be embedded in all we do.

How we will measure our performance:

Strategic Housing, Homelessness and Assistance
% households had a positive outcome and secured accommodation for 6 + months
Delivery of affordable housing per year working with Registered Providers, Developers and Homes England (Annual)
No of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) completed
Annual report on delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grants service
Leisure, Culture and Heritage
Annual Report from Freedom Leisure setting out the performance of all facilities and the wider wellbeing work and events they facilitate.
Health and Wellbeing
Total value of financial outcomes achieved as a result of the Citizen’s Advice contract
Further indicators will be developed as part of the Community Wellbeing Strategy

Priority 3 - Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment

Why this is important:

The impacts of Climate Change are well recognised and as a Council we need to demonstrate our commitment to adapt the Council's operations and mitigate the effects of Climate Change in the Borough.

We recognise that limiting the harmful effects of Climate Change cannot be achieved by any single organisation and the effort requires changes in the way we live and work.

Living and working in a clean and green local environment and having access to good quality green spaces and nature, directly contributes to improving individuals' health and wellbeing, by promoting both their physical and mental health, such as through the reduction of stress and anxiety.

Clean and green environments improves individuals' satisfaction with that area and their lives and fosters a strong sense of community.

Ensuring good air quality leads to better respiratory health and can lower the risk of long-term diseases, such as asthma, coronary heart disease, and some cancers.

Protecting nature, minimising waste, increasing the use of waste resources, and ensuring nature recovery, significantly contributes towards not only the health of our local area but our entire planet, making it more sustainable for our future generations.

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

1. To reduce the Council's Carbon Footprint and work towards Net Zero.
2. A smaller community carbon footprint and reduced borough wide carbon emissions.
3. Natural and built environments that are sustainable, protected, and enhanced.
4. Less waste and improved use of waste resources.
5. Public areas that are clean and tidy.
6. Improved public open spaces, play areas, parks and landscapes, including increased biodiversity, and wild flowering and pollinators.

How we will deliver this:

1. A new Climate Change Strategy and associated Action Plan will be in place in 2025 and delivered over the next four years.
2. Increase awareness of climate change and its causes with residents, organisations and businesses and encourage action to mitigate it.
3. Adopt an up-to-date Local Plan with positive policies that reduce carbon emissions and minimise the impact of climate change.
4. Promote biodiversity in all new development.
5. Produce a Nature Recovery Strategy.

6. Work with residents and partners, including Staffordshire Waste Partnership to support households to minimise the waste they produce and maximise their reuse and recycling.
7. Introduce weekly food waste collections to all domestic properties and Simpler Recycling initiatives.
8. Invest in our parks, play areas, and open spaces.

How we will measure our performance:

Climate Change
Indicators will be developed as part of the Climate Change Strategy
Waste and Recycling
% collections completed first time
Number of missed bin collections (including assisted)/100,000/qtr.
% Household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting
Amount of household residual waste collected per household (Kgs)
Amount of food waste collected
Streetscene
% residents' satisfied with the appearance of town centres (Stafford/Stone)
Satisfaction with the quality of our parks, play areas, and open spaces.

Priority 4: Effective Council

Why this is important:

Meeting the needs of our local community are our priority. We are here to provide services that matter to our residents. Customer expectations are changing with the development of technology and there is a need to ensure that services are available online 24/7 for those that wish to access our services in this way.

The Council is funded by local residents and we are accountable for spending wisely and effectively. The Council has been facing increasing challenges over the last few years in balancing its budget. The Council has seen its core funding from Government reduce year on year since 2008 and faces ongoing uncertainty as to future funding, with financial settlements only being given for a year at a time. Like households across the Borough, we have seen our costs increase. Furthermore, demand for some services such as homelessness is increasing.

Prudent financial management has meant there has been no significant service reductions and we will look to maintain this position. Savings have been delivered since 2011 through the sharing of back office services with Cannock Chase Council. More recently we have delivered savings from the sharing of a management team and further savings are expected from the sharing of front line services. This will be achieved through a transformation programme and investment in technology to drive efficiency savings.

The Council has a duty be open, honest and responsible in its decision making and to consider the views of residents and stakeholders when taking important decisions that affect the future of services and the community.

The recent central government White Paper setting out proposals to reorganise local government would see the abolition of district and borough councils as well as county councils. With the announcement only made on 16 December 2024 and limited detail available currently, it is too early to speculate with any certainty the impact this will have on the delivery of the priorities and actions set out in this corporate plan but it will undoubtedly have an effect.

As part of our priority for being an effective Council, we will develop an action plan to respond to the Government proposals and prepare for a smooth transition. This will include assessing the impact on our current corporate priorities and identifying new work streams. Where necessary we will adjust or pause our proposals so that we do not waste resources on actions that will no longer deliver a benefit for local residents and businesses in the borough.

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

1. Good customer experience;
2. Value for money to local taxpayers;
3. Good governance across the Council;

How we will deliver this:

1. Provide more services on-line, through the implementation of our digital strategy, whilst maintaining telephone and reception services for customers.
2. Complete delivery of the value for money improvement plan.
3. Review our Code of Governance.
4. Consult with the public and/or stakeholders on key projects that affect our communities.
5. Develop a plan to respond to the Government’s proposals for the re-organisation of local government, assess the effect on the delivery of the corporate plan and adjust our actions accordingly.

How we will measure our performance:

Good Customer Experience:
Days taken to process new Housing Benefit and Council Tax Claims
Days taken to process new Housing Benefit and Council Tax change of circumstances
% of calls answered
Average call wait time
Number of services (forms) available online
Number of online transactions

Funding Council Services
% of Council Tax collected annually
% National non-domestic rates (NNDR) collected
Value for Money
Completion of Value for Money Improvement Plan
External Auditor's Value for Money Opinion (reported separately)
Good Governance
Freedom Of Information requests within time i.e. 20 working days
Number of public consultations/engagement exercises undertaken
The Annual Governance Statement (reported separately)

Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy
Priority Delivery Plan for 2025-26 to 2027-28

Project	Actions and Milestones	25-26	26-27	27-28
Delivery of regeneration schemes	Stafford Town Centre Transformation			
	• Complete work on Station Approach project	X		
	• Complete demolition works to Guildhall shopping centre and former Co-operative department store	X		
	• Agree preferred development delivery option for cleared development sites	X	X	
	• Develop wider masterplan/development framework for Stafford town centre	X		
	Stafford Station Gateway			
	• Commence stakeholder engagement on delivery of the strategic vision for the site	X		
	• Remediation works	X		
	• Agree preferred development delivery option for cleared development sites		X	
Economic Growth Strategy	• Refresh Economic Growth Strategy	X		
Promotion of the Borough	• Promote Stafford town centre development prospectus at UKREiiF 2025	X		
Pipeline of projects	• Develop pipeline of future economic development and regeneration projects	X	X	X

Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy

Project	Actions and Milestones	25-26	26-27	27-28
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete review of section 106 policy and allocations Programme and Project Allocations for section 106 funding through evidence for Cannock Chase SAC and Leisure 	X		
		X	X	X
Delivery of planning services to enable economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish revised Local Development Scheme National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) assessment and New Local Plan implications 	X		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare New Local Plan and updated evidence base, 	X	X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft Plan (Regulation 18) consultation 		X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Local Plan Publication and Submission 			X
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement improvement plan for Development Management 	X	X	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full introduction of a chargeable pre-application service 	X		

**Priority 2 - Communities and Wellbeing
Priority Delivery Plan for 2025-26 to 2027-28**

Project	Actions and Milestones	25-26	26-27	27-28
Delivery of social housing	Prepare commission to scope the feasibility of housing development on a Council owned site.	X		
	Completion of feasibility work on developing housing on a Council owned site.		X	
	Develop work programme to deliver housing on Council owned site, subject to feasibility			X
Homelessness and Rough Sleeping	Start procurement for a Stafford Housing Strategy including scoping the development of Council Housing.	X		
	Completion of Stafford Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy	X		
	Stafford Housing Strategy and Council Housing technical support completed.		X	
	Plan for the development of Council Housing completed, including details of arrangements in place for stock management		X	
Leisure, Culture and Heritage Provision	Review of Stafford's leisure, culture and heritage provision	X		
	Decision on scope of Stafford's future commissioned service in context of end of initial 10 year term in November 2027	X		

Priority 2 - Communities and Wellbeing

Project	Actions and Milestones	25-26	26-27	27-28
Community Wellbeing	Work with the Integrated Care Partnership and Staffordshire County Council to reduce health inequalities	X	X	X
	Complete Community Wellbeing Strategy, setting out priorities across community safety and health (2025-2028).	X		
	Deliver a small grant scheme to voluntary, community and social enterprises, to support delivery of the corporate plan and Community Wellbeing Strategy	X		
	Agree a delivery plan with the Community Wellbeing Partnership, to guide the activity on community safety and health.	X		
	Complete the actions in the delivery plan and evaluate impact on Community Wellbeing.		X	X
	Evaluate the impact of the small grant scheme on an annual basis		X	X

Priority 3 - Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment
Priority Delivery Plan for 2025-26 to 2028-29

Project	Actions and Milestones	25-26	26-27	27-28
Delivery of Climate Change Action Plan	Training to be carried out for Senior Officers and Elected Members	X		
	Delivery of the Climate Change School Engagement Project	X		
	Further actions will be added each year from the Climate Change Action Plan	X	X	X
Local Plan with positive climate change policies	Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation study	X		
	Draft Plan (Regulation 18) consultation includes draft climate change and renewable policies		X	
	New Local Plan Publication and Submission			X
Biodiversity in new developments	Implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with statutory requirements	X	X	X
Nature Recovery	Produce a nature recovery strategy	X		
	Develop an action plan to deliver the nature recovery strategy	X		
	Delivery of the nature recovery action plan		X	X
Minimise Household Waste	Procurement and distribution of food waste caddies for the introduction of new mandatory domestic weekly food waste collection service	X		

Priority 3 - Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment

Project	Actions and Milestones	25-26	26-27	27-28
	Commence new weekly food waste collection service and Simpler Recycling initiatives		X	
	Monitor and action waste resource reduction	X	X	X
Investment in Parks and Open Spaces	Report to Cabinet on recommended play area/parks improvement programme	X		
	Identify funding and implement play area/parks improvement programme	X		
	Continue to identify funding and implementation of play area/parks improvement programme		X	X

Priority 4 - Effective Council
Priority Delivery Plan for 2025-26 to 2027-28

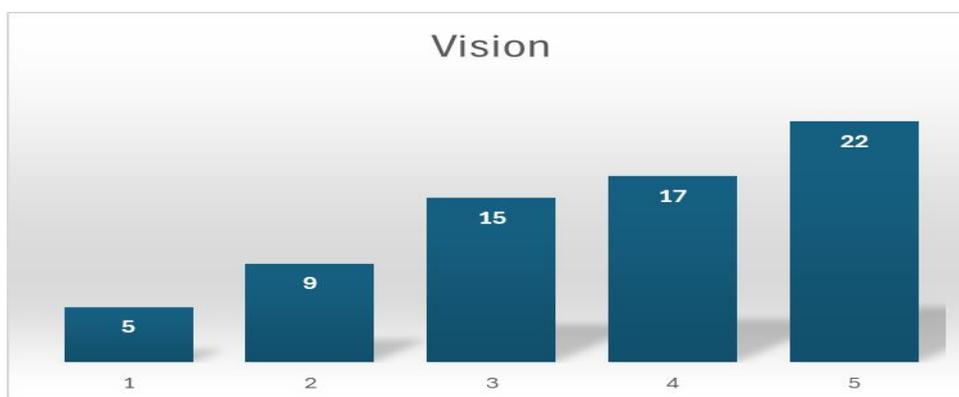
Project	Actions and Milestones	25-26	26-27	27-28
Provide more services on line and improve accessibility	Work with services to produce a work programme	X		
	Delivery of the work programme (key actions will be added once the plan has been developed and approved)	X	X	X
Delivery of the Value for Money Improvement Plan	Complete delivery of the actions set out in the VFM improvement plan (this is reported on separately to Cabinet and the Audit and Accounts Committee)	X		
Code of Governance	Review and update the Code of Governance	X		
Consultation	Undertake consultation/engagement with the public and stakeholders on key projects that affect our communities eg the production of the local plan. These will be determined each year as part of the development of the annual priority delivery plans.	X	X	X
Local Government Reorganisation	Develop an action plan to respond to the Government's Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation.	X		
	Delivery of the action plan (key actions will be added once the plan has been developed and approved)	X	X	X

Consultation Responses on Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Plan

Questions:

Q1 Vision: To be an effective Council that promotes a growing economy, strong, healthy communities and a sustainable environment.

- (a) **Do you agree with the proposed vision;** please score from 1 to 5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree.



Rating	Response	Percentage
1	5	8%
2	9	13%
3	15	22%
4	17	25%
5	22	32%
Total responses	68	

- (b) **What words would you choose to describe how you would want Stafford Borough to be in four years' time?**

"A nicer place to live"

"Forward looking, sustainable, cost effective, efficient"

"A council that cares about its own residents, in its borough, rebuilt a county town to be proud of"

"Vibrant, safe, prosperous, active, green"

"Innovative, consultative, customer-focused, financially-astute"

"Pro-active, sustainable, thriving, independent."

"A vibrant, safe go to destination with entertainment and leisure at the heart of its foundation"

"Strong healthy honest and forward thinking council for the community"

"A well managed and progressive council who listens to local needs, understands them and puts in place an action plan to fulfill those aspirations"

Q2 The 4 proposed priorities for the new corporate plan are:

(a) Do you agree that these should be our priorities?

Please score: 5 strongly agree; 4 agree; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 2 disagree; 1 strongly disagree

Priority	1	2	3	4	5	Overall	Average	Rank
Well Managed Council	9	1	4	12	42	281	4.13	1
Prosperous Economy	6	3	4	22	33	277	4.07	2
Communities and Wellbeing	7	1	7	16	37	279	4.10	3
Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment	5	6	17	13	27	255	3.75	4

(b) Is there anything that you would remove from the list of priorities?

The two priorities receiving the most comments were:

- Climate Change (respondents either felt that the Council has limited ability to have a meaningful impact on this or don't believe that it is an issue);
- Well Managed Council (the majority of respondent considered this should be a given)

(c) Is there anything else that you think we should add to the list of priorities?

"Focus on better lives for residents

Doing simple things well

Reducing expenditure and services."

"Something practical around encouraging new businesses in the area.

"Integration of service provision, making sure regeneration is sustainable and inclusive to all people.

"Being realistic in objectives rather trying to tackle everything. Small steps forward do make a difference."

"'local voice' priority. Local people need to have more say in what happens in their community"

"General improvement to leisure facilities"

"leveraging partnerships."

- (d) **Which of the 4 priorities do you think the Council should spend more money on?** (Please rank these in priority order where 1 is the priority you would spend the most money on and 4 is the least money)

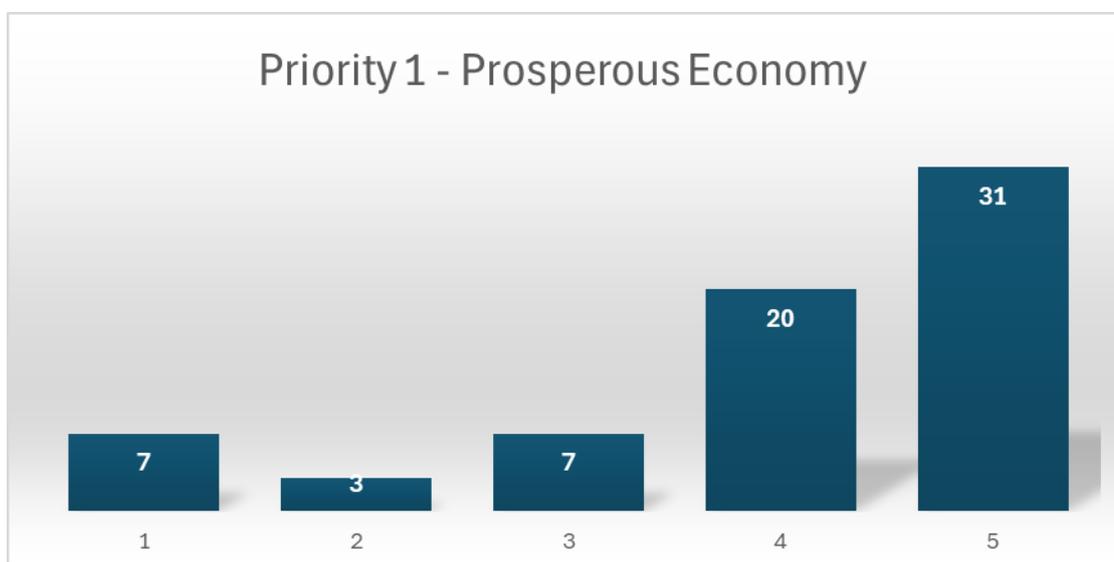
Priority	1	2	3	4	Overall	Average	Rank
Communities and Wellbeing	23	26	14	5	137	2.01	1
Economic Prosperity	28	14	16	10	144	2.11	2
Well Managed Council	10	12	17	29	201	2.95	3
Climate Change	7	16	21	24	198	2.91	4

Q3 Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy - What we want to achieve (our objectives):

- A prosperous economy where the workforce has the skills to drive growth to benefit our communities.
- Vibrant town centres that are the focus for economic, cultural and community life.

(a) Do you agree that these should be our objectives?

Please score: 5 strongly agree; 4 agree; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 2 disagree; 1 strongly disagree



Rating	Response	Percentage
1	7	10%
2	3	5%
3	7	10%
4	20	29%
5	31	46%
Total Responses	68	

(b) If you disagree or strongly disagree, please tell us why.

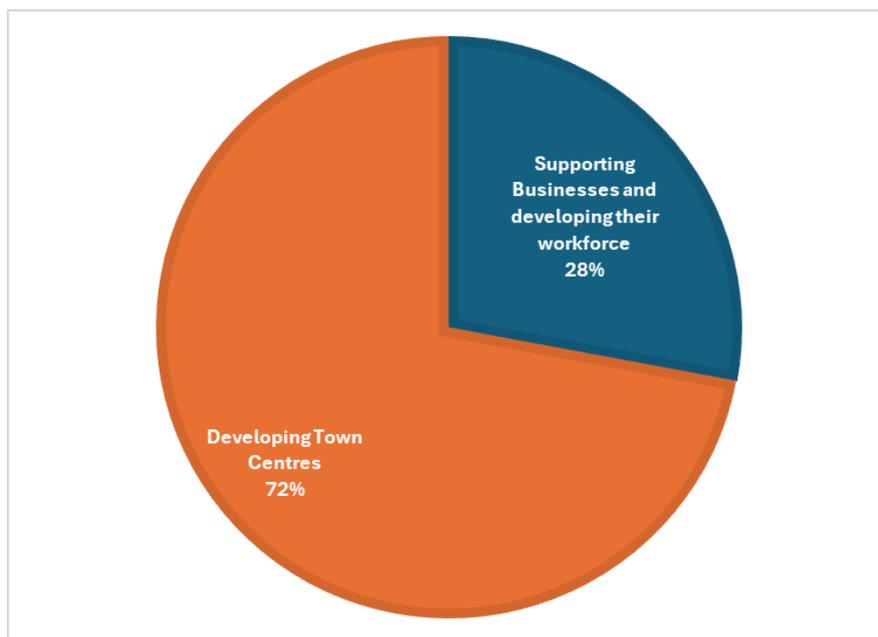
“A prosperous town centre should be the focus. Creating a town centre with a vibrant and thriving High Street will create a prosperous economy in Stafford. Too much emphasis is put on Stafford being a commuter town and most of the new housing feeds that. We need far more accessible business rates for shop owners, grants to re-open the many empty shops and retail units, redevelopment of the larger retail spaces.”

“Stafford Town centre is badly in need of regeneration. I know that there are plans in progress but time is of the essence. A lot of new properties have and are being built around the area but at present Stafford Town centre is not a very appealing place to go. Some great improvements are planned, just need to get on with the ASAP.”

“It is important but there is no mention of town centres outside of Stafford - what about Stone and Eccleshall. Where is the recognition of the importance of the rural economy, in an area that has a large rural area.”

(c) Do you think we should spend more money on:

- supporting businesses and developing their workforce; or
- developing town centres

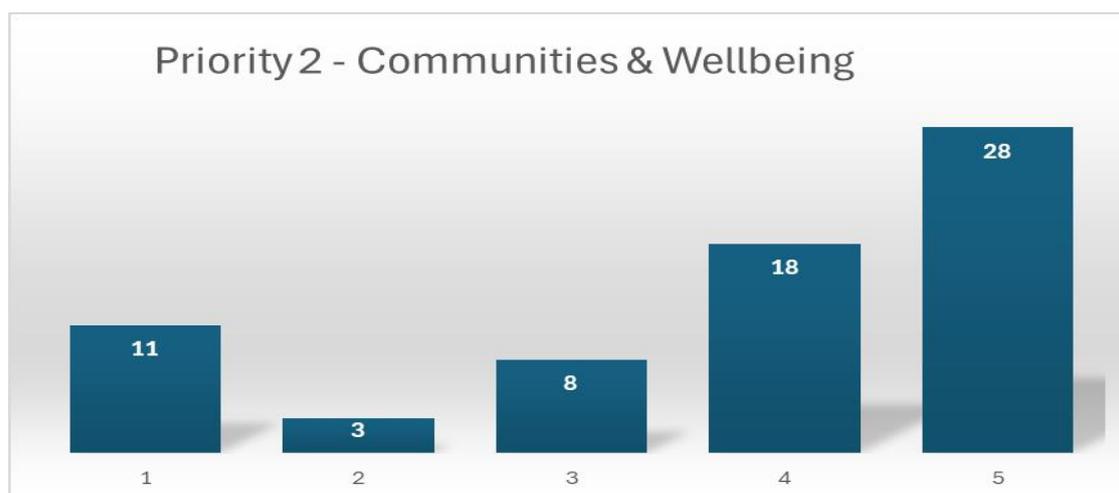


Q4 Priority 2 - Communities and Wellbeing - What we want to achieve (our objectives):

- A safe and secure place to live for local people, including social housing for those who need it.
- The opportunity for local people and communities to enjoy healthy lifestyles by providing good leisure and cultural services.
- A reduction in health inequalities and greater equality and inclusion.
- A safe and cohesive Borough

(a) Do you agree that these should be our objectives?

Please score: 5 strongly agree; 4 agree; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 2 disagree; 1 strongly disagree



Rating	Response	Percentage
1	11	16%
2	3	4%
3	8	12%
4	18	27%
5	28	41%
<i>Total Responses</i>	68	

(b) If you disagree or strongly disagree, please tell us why.

“Remove the bit about greater equality and inclusion, it is not a metric that has any meaningful end point and is a waste of resource. Health inequalities are equally vague. Focus on opportunities for communities to meet and a focus on crime reduction.”

“There are now too many houses in Stafford. The focus should be on making the borough safe, cleaning the waterways to make them usable for leisure, investing in the high street/market to create jobs in retail/independent businesses.”

(c) Which of the 4 objectives do you think the Council should spend more money on? (Please rank these in priority order where 1 is the priority you would spend the most money on and 4 is the least money)

- A safe and secure place to live for local people, including social housing for those who need it.
- The opportunity for local people and communities to enjoy healthy lifestyles by providing good leisure and cultural services.
- A reduction in health inequalities and greater equality and inclusion.
- A safe and cohesive Borough

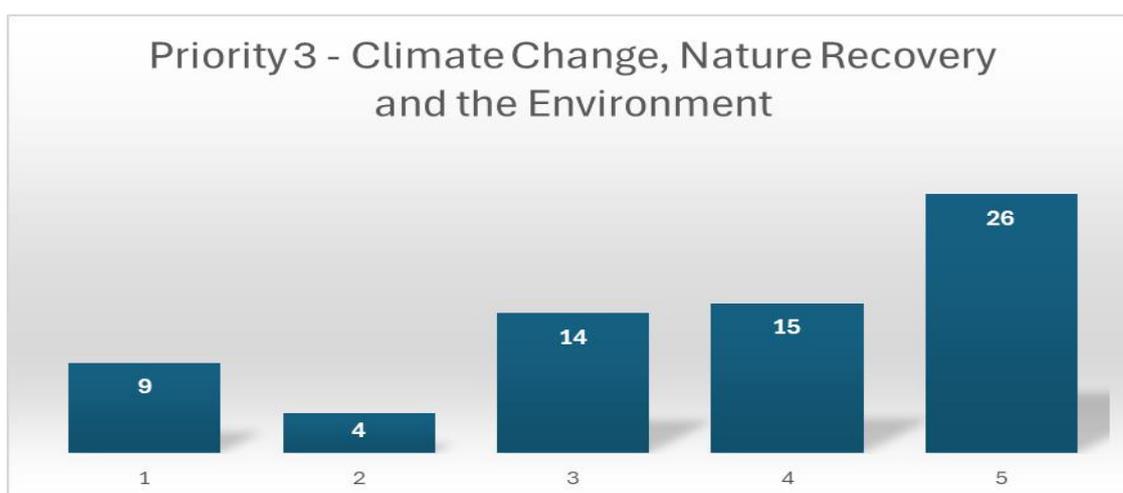
Objective	1	2	3	4	Overall	Average	Rank
Safe and Secure place to live	31	9	13	15	148	2.18	1
Healthy lifestyles	17	28	14	9	151	2.22	2
Safe and Cohesive Borough	15	17	17	19	176	2.58	3
Equality and Inclusion	5	14	24	25	205	3.01	4

Q5. **Priority 3 - Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment - What we want to achieve (our objectives):**

- Natural and built environments that are sustainable, protected, and enhanced.
- Public areas that are clean and tidy.
- Less waste.
- Reduced carbon emissions from the Council's activities.
- A smaller community carbon footprint and reduced borough wide carbon emissions.
- Improved public open spaces, play areas, parks and landscapes, including increased biodiversity, and wild flowering and pollinators.

(a) **Do you agree that these should be our objectives?**

Please score: 5 strongly agree; 4 agree; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 2 disagree; 1 strongly disagree



Rating	Response	Percentage
1	9	13%
2	4	6%
3	14	21%
4	15	22%
5	26	38%
<i>Total Responses</i>	68	

(b) If you disagree or strongly disagree, please tell us why.

“Clean and tidy is good. Increased health of the local environment is good. Everything else is just going to be a cost sink.”

“Little point exists in stringent Stafford Borough measures on emissions and environmental targets when China, India, Russia etc do nothing towards these ends.”

Q.6 The Council has included £250,000 in the budget to spend on climate change, which of the objectives would you like to see this money being spent on:

Please rank them from 1 to 5 where 1 is the most money and 5 is the least money

- Natural and built environments that are sustainable, protected, and enhanced.
- Less waste
- Reduced carbon emissions from the Council’s activities.
- A smaller community carbon footprint and reduced borough wide carbon emissions.
- Improved public open spaces, play areas, parks and landscapes, including increased biodiversity, and wild flowering and pollinators.

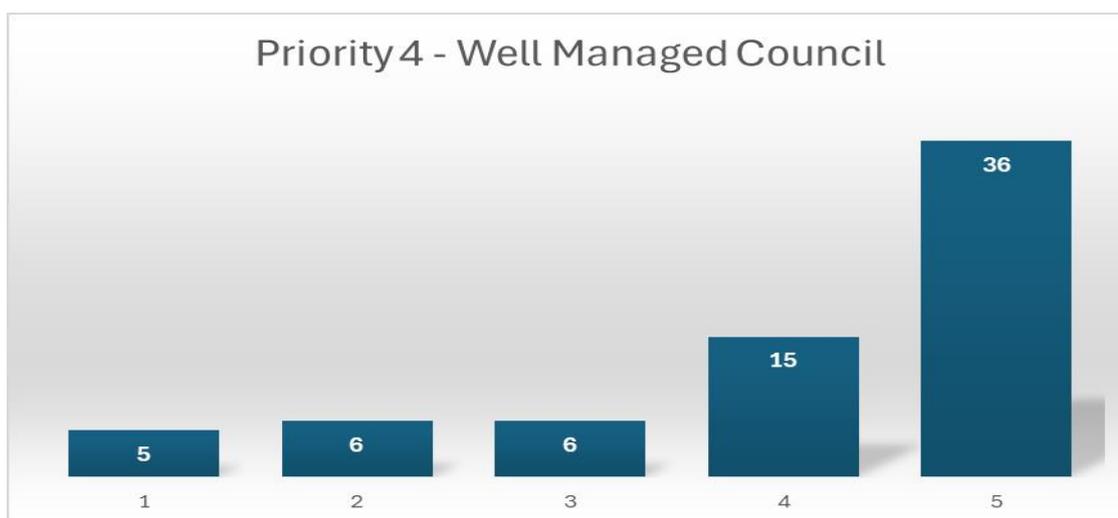
Objectives	1	2	3	4	5	Overall	Average	Rank
Improved open spaces	31	20	2	6	9	146	2.14	1
Sustainable, protected and enhanced	19	17	18	4	10	173	2.54	2
Less waste	9	17	30	10	2	183	2.69	3
Reduced emissions	4	9	6	29	20	256	3.76	4
Smaller carbon footprint	5	5	12	19	27	262	3.85	5

Q7 Priority 4: Well Managed Council - What we want to achieve (our objectives):

- Good customer experience;
- Effective management of Council finances
- Value for money to local taxpayers;
- Effective use of our assets
- Good governance across the Council;

(a) Do you agree that these should be our objectives?

Please score: 5 strongly agree; 4 agree; 3 neither agree nor disagree; 2 disagree; 1 strongly disagree



Rating	Response	Percentage
1	5	7%
2	6	9%
3	6	9%
4	15	22%
5	36	53%
<i>Total Responses</i>	68	

(b) If you disagree or strongly disagree, please tell us why.

“Top should be value for money”

“this shouldn't be a 'priority' this should just be what is expected as a general fact of running a council!”

“This should be achieved by keeping council tax increases at or about the level of inflation. Preferably the tax should be reduced by efficiency savings and looking to share services with more districts.”

Q8 Are there any other comments you would like to make on the Council's corporate plan or where it should spend more/less money?

“Cleaning the streets. Over grown grassed areas. Weeds in pavements and gutters
The towns look very untidy and reflected badly on the council”

“Spend more money investing in businesses and infrastructure and less on green initiatives and inclusion. Instead focus on practical elements such as reducing pollution in our green spaces and keeping communities safe.”

“Less on sustainability/climate change - no good to anyone if they have no money due to paying high bills”

In Summary

The 4 priorities in order of feedback are:

Priority	Rating					Overall	Average	Rank
	1	2	3	4	5			
Well Managed Council	5	6	6	15	36	275	4.04	1
Prosperous Economy	6	7	3	7	20	269	3.95	2
Communities and Wellbeing	11	3	8	18	28	253	3.72	3
Climate Change	9	4	14	15	26	249	3.66	4

Examples of comments on each of the Priorities:

Prosperous Economy

Town Centre

“Focus should be on the development of the town to encourage economic growth.”

“Vibrant town centre with a strong, long term retail base along with leisure facilities sustainable for 7 day week daytime and evening economy that will provide new long term employment for local residents”

Instead of more pound shops, McDonald's and B&M using the large retail spaces for things like climbing walls, indoor golf, trampoline spaces etc. places we can get kids into and doing something not just on streets”

“Visitors to the town are discouraged by lots of empty shops, fancy murals etc fool nobody. Stop wasting money.”

“a council that looks after the existing businesses and residents and preserves the heritage and character of the town”

“Business Involvement in town centre development.”

The town centre as a concept is dead. It would cost 100 million to revive, per town, every few years. You would need plentiful free parking, 0% business tax, strong commitment to promoting events, easy quick planning applications, its a pipe dream.”

Too many empty buildings in town. Building things just outside the town centre will not help this strategy.”

I would like to see that the town is made cleaner and safer, and I'd also hope that its historic routes play a role in any renovations that are done. (also more public bathrooms would be splendid.)”

“We should have more of a focus on locally grown produce and less focus on the superstores. In fact I'd like to see that the council prompts local growers setup shop in the town centre and the also promote local people to visit them by either scrapping the parking charges in town or having days where it's free.”

Prioritise the high street. Look to Shrewsbury for inspiration. Encourage small businesses and market stall holders. Offering cheap rent rates while business grow is better than boarded up premises. Look to Manchester and Chester for social food and drink courts to include independent food vendors. Clean the waterways and remove litter.”

“Money should be spent improving the town centre by bringing disused buildings back into use either as retail or accommodation premises. Preserve the character of heritage buildings in particular and tear down eyesores like the old job centre of Greyfriars so the land can be put to good use. Continue to focus on using brownfield sites for housing. Do not encroach on the greenbelt for housing or other development.”

Businesses and Jobs

“You should consider the impact of creating more jobs in the town by promoting small businesses. By the introduction of small local businesses providing local jobs. Balanced with the new developments which allow commuting. The wealthy people who may move to this town and can commute have families who would benefit from local jobs. Growing a closer community spirit.”

“Encouraging new businesses should be a specific goal.”

“Businesses need investment and encouragement. Lower rates for the shops.

“Growing the small business opportunities should be the focus. If you do that you will bring more people into the town. Don't waste money on building more multi-story car parks because the income stream looks good. They won't come if there is nothing to do. Focus on things for kids and families. Activities that will bring the whole family into town. Then provide a safe secure space with visible police to promote psychological safety. Then the town will grow.”

More needs to be done to make Stafford inviting and affordable, for small independent retailers to open up shop. Lower business rates and taxes, incentives, grants and refurbishment assistance. No point having spent millions on a town square in a dead town. All the proposed development seems to be outside of town.

From an economy perspective, skills are critical so the role of the new Institute of Technology will play is critical, so I am surprised there is no reference to it, as it will bring aspiration, skills and employment and partners have an active role.”

General

“A prosperous economy can only be driven by investment and attracting people to the local area to spend and invest in the facilities in the town. We need to provide reasons for this investment and make Stafford Borough an attractive place to visit and an aspirational place to live in. I would like to see support to Arts in the local area centering on the Gatehouse theatre, and with the new history centre and library nearby could form the embryo of a “cultural quarter” for the town centre regeneration, bringing in both local and regional people to increase footfall and spending in the town centre. Theatre and performing arts is very much an inclusive local activity which needs to be understood and funded by local people. Good facilities in the town centre will attract people and investment and the Gatehouse theatre is a Jewel in the Crown already there, it just needs to be managed and funded locally to enable the full potential to be realised.”

“I think good parking needs to be considered. I think things to encourage people to within the town need to be looked at, and to stop pulling people away from the town with pockets of shopping areas. The town needs to be the hub of Stafford.”

“Thriving towns attracting people from inside and outside of the area as Lichfield does. A place where culture and leisure drives investment, skills and opportunity. The area is already an attractive place to live and work and this needs shouting about more. A place

where our children can thrive and our old people are supported to live independently for as long as possible. A place that feels safe.”

“I would like Stafford Borough to be a place where people could be proud to live, and proud to say that this is where they live. The town has been decimated, dragged from one end to the other. I would like Stafford to be thriving, a hub of entertainment with a young and exciting vibrant community, built on positivity, growth and diversity.”

“Break larger disused buildings into smaller units at low rents/rates to encourage small independent retailers. Abandon the idea of building retail and offices behind the goods yard/railway. This will either result in a lot of unused buildings in that area or lead to further decline in the town centre. If it does happen to be successful I envision an awful lot of additional traffic on already congested roads. Focus all efforts on complete regeneration of the existing town centre to make it a 'destination'. In 4 years Stafford needs to feel safe, vibrant and a place that people want to go to rather than avoid. Please restore the market square to a place with flower beds and benches.”

Communities and Wellbeing

Housing and Communities

“...stop building more and more housing estates with no facilities, ruining the character of the town and turning it into one giant faceless housing estate”

“I think housing should be the lowest priority. There is far too much building development in Stafford without sufficient infrastructure to accommodate it.”

“Ensure that any new housing is environmentally friendly and sustainable eg well insulated with heat pumps and sited only in existing suburban and urban areas. No more destruction of green spaces and building on agricultural land which should instead provide nature a home. Employment land must be developed in a way that maximises employment per square metre and minimises destruction of nature and local communities. No more warehousing.”

Equality/Health Inequalities

“Seeing the words equality and inclusion” tends to infer that current minorities get given better treatment than current majorities.

“Help small local Gyms, clubs, communities by supporting their needs so they can pass on in health and wellbeing to local people”

“If you look at marginalised groups you will see there is a lot of hate no matter what is being done, that's a massive challenge for anyone to try and battle”

Leisure, Culture and Heritage

“Please run the theatre and high house and take it back from the current company”

“This facility should not be outsourced to Freedom Leisure and should be returned to the borough as Freedom are not investing in its people, the properties and upkeep. The Theatre should be in a trust.”

I really do hope that when their contract is up that you will consider a Trust so that a local board can decide what happens to our theatre and how improvements are made so that the people who support this venue will also enjoy the improvements.”

“Healthy lifestyles - this so important the park and play area in the town is lovely but we do need more outside areas for people walk, cycle and socialise. Regarding the leisure centre

it's a great place but unfortunately poorly run it really needs a revamp it's dated the swimming area is dirty this is not because it's not cleaned it is but there are not enough people employed to keep this facility up to the standards it needs this is again poor management and commitment from the non profit organisation organisation Freedom Leisure who really do not care ! Please consider having local companies to run our facilities who care about the area and the people and they are serving.

"Every council should aspire to provide a safe and secure place to live and work, which meets the requirements of it's local community. Of importance also is a leisure and support facilities to help people with a cost effective means to maintain a healthy outlook. Also of importance is a cultural requirement to art, film and drama within the local community provide cost effective access to both watching and participating in."

More swimming opportunities than just the leisure centre.

I also feel that local sports clubs, nor actually run by the council, but provide opportunities to both young and old alike, and run and managed by very hard working volunteers looked favourably on by the council when development opportunities arise."

Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment

Climate change

"Climate change and the Environment should be removed, they are not things you are capable of meaningfully impacting as a council. Instead focus on Nature recover, pollution reduction and clean outdoor spaces. You can barely keep public bins from overflowing, maybe deal with that before you start going on about fighting climate change."

"You will not improve climate change and nature by building on brown belt land. The council need to properly listen to the Stafford people. This will allow you to understand what it is we want."

"Whilst I agree Climate change should be considered I don't think it should be a stumbling block. Everything evolves over time. The climate changes naturally."

"Nature and the environment is thriving - it is always good to ensure that we support the local habitat and animals but ultimately it's doing well without us. The council should be more considerate of which areas they allow development to be undertaken to ensure unnecessary destruction of wildlife areas doesn't happen.

"Whilst I agree that the natural environment needs improving and maintaining I think greater care in rewilding areas needs careful consideration as the management of these areas needs careful consideration."

Environment/Appearance

"I don't know what a sustainable environment is but the borough needs to concentrate on how the environment looks - everyone feels better is their surroundings are attractive. Don't use sustainability/wilding as an excuse for not cutting the verges etc"

"Stafford looks dirty and littered. The high streets could invest in visual appeal with the support of local garden centres to provide hanging baskets and flower boxes. Make Stafford visually appealing to visit"

"Sadly public opinion tends to be 'someone else can clear my mess up' coupled with our more throw away society means that waste management is an increasing issue. However if something is clean and tidy then there is less likelihood of rubbish building up than if the

place is littered. It's a difficult one to process. Supporting local communities to manage themselves periodically could help."

"Maintaining open spaces by grass mowing, shrub pruning etc to prevent them from being taken over by brambles

"They need to improve the parks on the housing estates... we have a few parks but they are all run down, not looked after and not suitable for children to play on. It's like they have been abandoned. Which is a shame as kids need to spend more time outside"

"safer walking areas. places for dogs to go off lead. benches for older people to use."

"Clean, Litter free. Graffiti free.

Well Managed Council

"A well managed council should be a given."

A well managed council should also save money through efficiency savings, not cost more money."

"If you look after your staff and provide them with a positive working environment they will be more inclined to provide a good service. If you don't treat them well they become disengaged."

"Employees need a can do approach as opposed to a can't do and I'll pass the problem on to someone else whilst ticking the box."

General Comments on the Corporate Plan

"Under current Government proposals you may be forced to become part of a larger unitary authority. Your plan should include a priority around managing that transition competently in a way that ensures the delivery of your other priorities!"

"It is great that you are consulting on this. I would like to see more locally managed and funded items where the people in charge of the finances really understand the requirements, rather than through nationwide management companies to then allocate those funds as they may see fit."

Comments on services/functions that are not SBC's responsibility:

"Apart from providing Leisure and cultural services the priorities are for others eg the health service and the police. Social housing should be for the housing association to deliver. Why can it be sensible to duplicate an existing resource."

"Improve present infrastructure e.g. Empty home refurbished, road improvements, 24hr hospital A&E, Flood defences in place"

"... employ your own care workers instead of paying private care agencies. Look back to when there were Home helps, trained and employed by the council. Retention of staff was not a problem due to good working practices and pay, giving rise to job satisfaction and client satisfaction"

Prioritise walkability with Cycle Routes and Public Transport around the town to reduce car dependence."

"Concentrate on highways, roads and pathways are dangerous and an eyesore"

"Rebuild the roads and probably bike more cut throughs"

“Reduce traffic congestion - in itself this will reduce carbon emissions from queuing traffic.”

“Please can we have fewer roadworks, less development. Just stop and focus on making what we have better without digging up and and starting anew, do what you do really well before starting anything new.”

“Not in your remit, but you can bring pressure to bear. There are No rehabilitation/assessment hospital beds locally.”

“Spend money on preventing flooding rather than surface fixes. Seriously consider the negative effect of this. For example I do not bother going anywhere near town when heavy rain occurs as carparks flood and I don't want my car trapped, I can't get back home easily due to diversions with floods, some shops are hard to access due to floods.”

“The rivers in Stafford need a good cleanup including dredging to help reduce flooding. Drainage needs to also be improved on Staffords roads, as many are inaccessible in winter months.”

“More money spent on improving education and SEN services including assessments to reduce long waiting lists and stress on families.

More money on mental health services.

More money spent on adoption services including the Uttoxeter office which is not fit for purpose, a new location is needed.”

Social care particularly dementia care and mental health for young people”

Agenda Item 4(b)i**VFM Progress Report - Quarter 3 2024-25**

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Report of:	Head of Transformation and Assurance
Portfolio:	Resources Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise Members on the progress in the delivery of the VFM Improvement Plan at the end of Quarter 3 2024/25.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the progress at the end of Quarter 3 2024/25 in the delivery of the VFM Improvement Plan set out at **APPENDIX 1**.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.2 The information allows Cabinet to ensure that all appropriate steps are being taken to address the findings of the External Auditors and improve the Council's governance arrangements.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The Council's External Auditor's Annual Report (AAR) for 2021/22 and 2022/23, highlighted several significant issues relating to the Council's financial, governance and asset arrangements and made recommendations for addressing these.
- 3.2 An improvement plan to address the issues was drawn up and approved by the Audit and Accounts Committee (13 February 2024) and subsequently by Council (27 February 2024).
- 3.3 This report sets out the progress made at the end of Quarter 3 2024/25. Of the 26 actions due to be completed, 80% have been completed or are on target.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Good governance and financial management specifically links to the Council's priority to be "a well-run, financially sustainable and ambitious organisation, responsive to the need of our customers and communities and focussed on delivering our outcomes". It also underpins the delivery of the Council's other corporate priorities and operational services.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 As part of the work of the External Auditors, they are required to undertake a review of the Council's arrangements for Value for Money and their finding are set out in the Annual Audit Report for 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- 5.2 The AAR for 2021/22 and 2022/23 identified several areas of concern relating to the Council's financial, governance and asset arrangements and made recommendations for addressing these. One statutory recommendation was made and this is being progressed as a priority.
- 5.3 The External Auditors acknowledged that there has been a lack of capacity in key service areas to address these issues. The Council has sought to address this by agreeing additional funds as part of the budget process for the Finance and Transformation Teams.
- 5.4 A VFM improvement plan was been produced to address the issues raised in the AAR. The timescales for implementation were revised in discussions with the Council's new External Auditors and approved by Cabinet in December 2024. A commentary on progress for each of the actions up to the end of quarter 3 of 2024/25 is set out in **APPENDIX 1**. Overall progress is summarised in the table below:

Table 1: Summary of Progress - VFM Improvement Plan

Quarter					Not applicable	Total Actions
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule		
Q4 2023/24	13					13
Q1 2024/25	1					1
Q2 2024/25	1	1				2
Q3 2024/25	2	3	3	1	1	10
TOTAL	17 (65%)	4 (15%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	26

- 5.5 At the end of quarter 3, of the 26 actions due for delivery:
- 21 (80%) have been completed or are in progress; and
 - 5 (20%) of the actions are behind schedule or are no longer applicable.
- 5.6 Steady progress continues to be made in completing the actions set out in the improvement plan. All but one of the actions for quarter 4 (2023/24) through to quarter 2 (2024/25) have now been completed in full. The outstanding action relates to recruitment of Finance staff which has to date been unsuccessful. There has been some minor slippage in quarter 3.
- 5.7 Progress in delivering the actions set out in the improvement plan are being overseen by:
- The Leadership Team; and
 - Audit and Accounts Committee.

The Audit and Accounts Committee will escalate any concerns to Cabinet and the Cabinet will also receive periodic updates.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

Failure to deliver the improvement plan and address the External Auditor's recommendations has been included in the Council's Strategic Risk Register.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: VFM Improvement Plan - Summary of Progress

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

Report to Audit and Accounts Committee 13 February 2024

Contact Officer: Judith Aupers

Telephone Number: 01543 464411

Ward Interest: All

Report Track: Cabinet 6 March 2025

Audit and Accounts Committee 26 March 2025

Key Decision: No

VFM Improvement Plan - Progress Report

Summary of Progress at 31 December 2024

Quarter					No longer applicable	Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule		
Q4 2023/24	13					13
Q1 2024/25	1					1
Q2 2024/25	1	1				2
Q3 2024/25	2	3	3	1	1	10
Q4 2024/25						11
Q1 2025/26						14
Q2 2025/26						5
Q3 2025/26						5
Q4 2025/26						3
Cumulative Total to Date	17 (65%)	4 (15%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	26 at the end of Q3

Commentary on Progress

Steady progress continues to be made. 2 key strategies/policies have been approved in quarter 3 (transformation and digital) with work is progressing on the review of hybrid working.

Capacity in the Finance Team continues to be an issue. The recruitment to the 2 senior posts has been unsuccessful but recruitment has commenced for 2 other posts and shortlisting is in progress.

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
Quarter 4 2023-24						
1.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 to 2026/27 drafted and approved by Cabinet and Council. Modelling, assumptions and risk assessment included as part of the budget report. MTFS includes assessment of likely future government funding.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer		Completed	★
2.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Capital Strategy to be updated in accordance with the revised Prudential Code.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer		Completed	★
3.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Bring treasury strategy and its reporting to members up to date	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer		Completed	★
4.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Produce draft financial statements in line with statutory requirements and working with external auditors to deliver audits effectively.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	This is to be discussed with Azets as to approach	Agreed with GT/Azets not to audit the 21/22 and 22/23 accounts. This is in line with the national statutory dispensation which has been approved by Parliament.	★

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
		(Decision to be made on outstanding audits as there is a consultation taking place as to how to clear the backlog of audits nationally at present)			The Accounts for both years have been completed and reported to the Audit & Accounts Committee (20 November 2024).	
5.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Draft accounts published up to 2023/24	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 4 - 2023/24	The draft accounts for 2021-22 and 2022-23 have been published.	★
7.	Corporate Service Transformation and Efficiency Programme (Key Rec 1)	Align the MTFs to the corporate priorities in the Council's Business Plan including the costed climate change actions	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and Head of Transformation and Assurance		Completed as part of budget setting 2024/25	★
8.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Implement outstanding recommendation from Cyber and Network Security Audit - staff to complete cyber training	Chief Technology Officer and Information Manager	Quarter 4 - 2023/24	Staff have completed cyber training	★
9.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Finalise the change management strategy	Chief Technology Officer	Quarter 4 - 2023/24	Change Management Strategy has been approved by Leadership Team	★

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
10.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Finalise Information Governance Framework	Head of Law and Governance	Quarter 4 - 2023/24	Completed - approved by Cabinet	★
11.	Risk Management (Improvement Rec 2)	Review of risks in annual budget report to be consistent with corporate process	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer		Completed	★
12.	Other Related Actions	Review of Audit Reporting to Leadership Team and escalation protocols	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 4 2023/24	Completed - quarterly progress reports are being discussed at Leadership Team	★
13.	Risk Management (Improvement Rec 2)	Review of risk management policy and framework - includes review of format of the Strategic Risk Register (SRR)	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 4 - 2023/24	Approved by Leadership Team. To be approved by Cabinet on 5 December 2024.	★
14.	Risk Management (Improvement Rec 2)	Review of guidelines on risk implications for committee reports	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 4 - 2023/24	Approved by Leadership Team.	★

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
Quarter 1 2024-25						
16.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Restructure of the Finance Team and creation of additional capacity	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 1 - 2024/25	Restructure agreed.	★
Quarter 2 2024-25						
25.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Commence recruitment to new Finance team structure	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer and Deputy S151 Officer	Quarter 2 - 2024/25	Recruitment for 2 senior posts was unsuccessful. Recruitment in progress for two other vacant posts; currently shortlisting.	✓
40.	Other Related Actions (from AGS 2023-24)	Review of project management arrangements and project planning for the delivery of the town centre schemes.	Head of Economic Development and Planning	Quarter 2 - 2024/25	Additional interim consultancy resource has been appointed to support the programme/project management of the Stafford town centre regeneration projects. Board meetings, steering groups and weekly project team meetings have been re-established; with regular review of project plans and programmes.	★

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
Quarter 3 2024-25						
17.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Regular performance monitoring to be re-established with budget managers and Leadership Team.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 3 2024/25	Period 6 monitoring for 2024-25 has been completed and has been reported in the budget setting report for 2025/26.	
18.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Reporting on the delivery of savings to be established and discussed at Strategic Leadership Team meetings. Where appropriate, project plans will be developed to support the delivery of significant/complex savings.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 3 2024/25	As per the 2025/26 budget, there is no material savings programme in place.	N/A
19.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Update IT security policy and adopt a cyber security policy	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Technology Officer	Quarter 3 2024/25	The policy has been updated and is back with the Head of Service for review. There has been some slippage and the draft will now be submitted to Leadership Team for approval in Q4.	

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
20.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Provide refresher training to ensure compliance with process for 3 rd party data transfers and completion of privacy impact assessments	Chief Technology Officer and Information Manager	Quarter 3 2024/25	The Data Transfer Policy has been reviewed and the refresher training has been delivered.	★
21.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Complete the IT strategy	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources)	Quarter 3 2024/25	The Digital Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 5 December 2024.	★
23.	HR related issues (Improvement Recs 1 and 3)	Complete review of hybrid working. This will inform the development of the workforce strategy and the review of the Code of Conduct as well as support the development of an asset strategy.	Head of Transformation and Assurance and HR Manager	Quarter 3 2024/25	A report had been drafted and is with the Head of Service for review. The report will now be presented to Leadership Team in Q4	▲
26.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Lesson learnt exercise to be undertaken of implementation of the finance system	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 3 2024/25	Work on this has been deferred due to the ongoing capacity issues in the Finance Team and the need to prepare the budget. It has now been rescheduled for Q1.	✘

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
27.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Training of managers in budget management and use of the new finance system.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 3 2024/25	The first session has been delivered to Leadership Team. The sessions with managers will be delivered during Q1 25/26.	
33.	Performance Management (Key Rec 4)	Establish corporate project resources to support transformation work (funding allocated in 2024/25 budget)	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 3 2024/25	The team structure was approved as part of the report to Cabinet on the Transformation Strategy (5 December 2024).	
43.	Corporate Service Transformation and Efficiency Programme (Key Rec 1)	<p>Process to be established for developing a service transformation and efficiency programme.</p> <p>Initial steps for both:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a discussion with the Cabinet to review priorities and key projects; • engagement with Heads of Service and Service Managers to review current service levels for statutory and discretionary services (to include high level benchmarking) - this will be a pre-cursor to bringing the services together and establish the baseline for service transformation (this will 	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 3 - 2024/25	<p>A transformation strategy and plan has been developed. This was approved by Cabinet on 5 December 2024.</p> <p>A workshop has been held with managers setting out the transformation process and the preparatory work stages are underway.</p>	

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
		<p>build on the initial work done on SLAs).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of options for efficiency savings and transformation <p>Transformation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation options to be assessed and added to transformation programme for prioritisation. Will need to consider any investment required to deliver savings/service improvements; resourcing to deliver the changes, etc Project Manager and Project support officer to be recruited to support delivery of transformation programme, funding allocated in budget 2024/25 to fund posts; Training of managers and key officers in transformation techniques 			<p>A review of key priority projects has been undertaken and this was approved by Cabinet on 7 November 2024.</p> <p>The transformation team structure was approved as part of the report to Cabinet on the Transformation Strategy (5 December 2024).</p>	
Quarter 4 2024-25						
5.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Draft accounts published up to 2023/24	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
6.	Corporate Service Transformation and Efficiency Programme (Key Rec 1)	Consultation to take place with stakeholders as part of development of new corporate plan and priorities.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
15.	Procurement and Contract Management (Improvement Rec 5)	Update the contracts register and ensure it is compliant with transparency requirements	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Leadership Team	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
22.	HR related issues (Improvement Recs 1 and 3)	Establish our culture, values and type of organisation we want to be. This work will inform the following actions	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
24.	Risk Management (Improvement Rec 2)	Training for Leadership Team, managers, team leaders/principal officers on risk management	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
30.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Develop assurance reporting for IT eg report on outcome of annual health check/penetration testing to Leadership Team and Audit Committee	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Technology Officer	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
31.	IT (Key Rec 2)	Review of what we include in procurements re ICT controls and information governance	Head of Transformation and Assurance, Chief Technology Officer, Head of Law and Governance and Information Manager	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
34.	Performance Management (Key Rec 4)	Review of all projects, the current governance arrangements and establish project reporting to Leadership Team	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and Deputy Chief Executive (Place)	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
37.	Procurement and Contract Management (Improvement Rec 5)	Review and update the Procurement Regulations	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources), Head of Transformation and Assurance and Head of Law and Governance	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
38.	Procurement and Contract Management (Improvement Rec 5)	The key elements of the procurement strategy will be built into the procurement regulations rather than as a stand-alone document.	Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
56.	Fraud (Key Rec 3)	Assess fraud risks and include in risk registers as appropriate	Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager and Leadership Team	Quarter 4 - 2024/25		
Quarter 1 2025-26						
28.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Review of Financial Regulations	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
35.	Risk Management (Improvement Rec 2)	Develop risk registers for each Directorate and ICT	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources), Deputy Chief Executive (Place) and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
36.	Risk Management (Improvement Rec 2)	Establish escalation process between other risk registers and the SRR eg services, projects	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
39.	Procurement and Contract Management (Improvement Rec 5)	Provide training for managers on procurement and contract management	Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
41.	Other Related Actions (from AGS 2023-24)	Preparation of a transformation plan for Development Management to further reduce the backlog of planning applications and to manage this within the approved budget.	Head of Economic Development and Planning	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
44.	Corporate Service Transformation and Efficiency Programme (Key Rec 1)	Consultation and engagement to be embedded into the planning for the delivery of key projects where appropriate to ensure schemes meet community needs eg regeneration projects, redevelopment of play areas	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
45.	Fraud (Key Rec 3)	Review Anti - Fraud and Bribery Policy	Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
46.	Fraud (Key Rec 3)	Review of Confidential Reporting Policy	Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
47.	Fraud (Key Rec 3)	Assess compliance against Cipfa 2014 Code for Fraud and develop an action plan as necessary	Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
57.	Performance Management (Key Rec 4)	Develop and adopt a performance management framework to establish golden thread from Corporate Plan to service plans through to employee reviews. Framework to include protocols for ensuring data quality	Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
58.	Performance Management (Key Rec 4)	Review our performance report style - delivery plans and KPIs. To consider the development of performance outcome measures	Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
59.	Performance Management (Key Rec 4)	Performance reporting for waste and leisure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review of KPIs for monitoring and reporting on performance; • establish internal validation process of contract performance; and • review information reported to Cabinet / Scrutiny 	Head of Transformation and Assurance, Head of Operations and Head of Wellbeing	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
60.	Other Related Actions	Review of Code of Governance	Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
61.	Fraud (Key Rec 3)	Review the information we report on fraud work (including data matching) to the Audit Committee.	Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 1 - 2025/26		
Quarter 2 2025-26						
29.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Training for managers on Financial Regulations	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources)	Quarter 2 - 2025/26		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
32.	Performance Management (Key Rec 4)	Establish a Corporate Project Management Methodology. Provide templates, guidelines, and training for key officers (LT, Service Managers and key Principal Officers/Team Leaders).	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 2 - 2025/26		
48.	HR related issues (Improvement Recs 1 and 3)	Develop a hybrid working policy and review other related policies and processes.	Head of Transformation and Assurance and HR Manager	Quarter 2 - 2025/26		
54.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Implementation of remaining module of the finance system, ongoing development and maximising use of system functionality	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 2 - 2025/26		
55.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Performance reporting for Cabinet and Scrutiny to be developed. This will be done alongside the review and development of performance and risk reporting.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 2 - 2025/26		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
Quarter 3 2025-26						
42.	Financial Sustainability (Statutory Rec 1)	Follow-on zero-based budgeting session with managers to continue work started as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 3 - 2025/26 for 26/27 budget setting		
49.	HR related issues (Improvement Recs 1 and 3)	Review and update the Employee Code of Conduct	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Head of Law and Governance	Quarter 3 2025/26		
50.	Procurement and Contract Management (Improvement Rec 5)	Work with managers and the County's Procurement Team to develop a procurements pipeline	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Leadership Team	Quarter 3 2025/26		
51.	Procurement and Contract Management (Improvement Rec 5)	Process to be established for publication of key data on the Council's website to meet transparency requirements re spend data, contracts register	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and Head of Transformation and Assurance	Quarter 3 2025/26		

No	Theme	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale	Progress Update	Progress Rating
53.	Other Related Actions (from AGS 2023-24)	Review of Scheme of Delegations as part of shared services transformation.	Monitoring Officer and Leadership Team	Quarter 3 2025/26		
Quarter 4 2025-26						
52.	Other Related Actions	Establish an inventory of key policies and a programme of periodic reviews	Leadership Team	Quarter 4 - 2025/26		
62.	HR related issues (Improvement Recs 1 and 3)	Development of a workforce strategy that links to long term transformation/shared services	Head of Transformation and Assurance and HR Manager	Quarter 4 - 2025/26		
63.	Other Related Actions	Development of Assurance Model	Head of Transformation and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager	Quarter 4 - 2025/26		

Agenda Item 4(b)ii**Quarter 3 Performance Report for 2024-25**

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Report of:	Head of Transformation and Assurance
Portfolio:	Resources Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise Members on the progress in delivering the Council's priorities and performance at the end of the quarter 3 for 2024-25.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the progress made during quarter 3 in the delivery of the Council's priorities and performance as set out in **APPENDICES 1 AND 2**.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.2 The performance information allows Cabinet to monitor progress in delivery of the Council's corporate priorities and operational services.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs) for 2024/25 have been produced pending the development of a new Corporate Business Plan. They set out the Council's key strategic and operational priorities and the key actions to deliver these.
- 3.2 Overall, 76% of the key actions have been delivered or are on schedule to be completed. Progress in delivering the PDPs is summarised in 5.3 of the report and set out in detail in **APPENDICES 1A TO 1D**.
- 3.3 With regard to the operational performance of the key services of the Council, 76% of targets have been met or exceeded. Further details can be found at 5.6 and in **APPENDIX 2**.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The indicators and actions contribute individually to all of the Council's priorities.

5 Report Detail

5.1 The Corporate Business Plan 2021-24 sets out the Council's overarching priorities. Pending the development of the new corporate business plan, the overarching priority themes remain the same but new priority delivery plans have been developed setting out the key strategic and operational priority projects and the key actions to deliver these.

Priority Delivery Plans

5.2 The Priority Delivery Plans are set out in **APPENDICES 1A TO 1D**, to this report. These plans establish the actions and timetable for delivery and form the basis of the Council's performance reporting framework.

5.3 A commentary on performance and a rating for each of the actions set out in the Delivery Plans is given in **APPENDICES 1A TO 1D**. A summary of progress, by rating, is given in table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of progress in delivery of key projects/actions as at end of Quarter 3

Performance Rating	Action complete	Work on Target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	N/A	Actions due by end of Quarter 3	Actions not yet due	Total Number of Actions
Corporate Business Plan Priority							N/A	
The Economy	10	3	5			18	9	27
Community	7	3	1		1	12	12	24
Climate Change			3			3	0	3
The Council	7	4	1			12	5	17
Total	24 (54%)	10 (22%)	10 (22%)		1 (2%)	45	26	71

5.4 At the end of quarter 3, of the 45 projects/actions due for delivery in this period:

- 34 (76%) have been completed or are on target to be completed; and
- 11 (24%) are behind schedule or no longer applicable.

Key Performance Indicators

5.5 In addition to the Delivery Plans, performance is also reported against the delivery of key operational services; Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for these services are set out in **APPENDIX 2**. In summary:

Table 2 - Summary of key performance indicators for Quarter 3

Corporate Business Plan Priority					N/A	Total Number of KPIs
	Performance exceeds target	Performance on target	Performance < 5% below target	Performance > 5% below target	Not Available / Annual	
The Economy	4		2	1		7
Community	7	3	1		8	19
The Council	4	1	1	1	6	13
Total	15	4	4	2	14	39

5.6 Of the 25 indicators due to be reported on in quarter 3:

- 19 indicators show performance on or above target (76%); and
- 6 indicators show performance below target (24%).

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. The financial management of the PDPs is standard in accordance with Financial Regulations and any measure to address a performance shortfall as reflected in a PDP report will require compensatory savings to be identified in the current year and be referred to the budget process for additional resources in future years.

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

The Council's Strategic Risk Register sets out the risks the Council faces in delivering its priorities.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

Equality and diversity matters are addressed in individual services areas and by undertaking equality impact assessments for projects and programmes of work where this is necessary and appropriate.

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix 1A: The Economy

Appendix 1B: Community

Appendix 1C: Climate Change

Appendix 1D: The Council

Appendix 2: Key Performance Indicators

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

Corporate Plan 2021-24

Contact Officer: Judith Aupers

Telephone Number: 01543 46411

Ward Interest: Nil

Report Track: Cabinet 6 March 2025
Resources Scrutiny Committee 5 March 2025
Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny 13 March 2025
Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 20 March 2025

Key Decision: No

Priority Delivery Plan for 2024-25

Priority 1 - The Economy

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

Quarter					Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	
1 and 2	5		3		8
3	5	3	2		10
4					9
TOTAL	10 (56%)	3 (16%)	5 (28%)		18 to Q3

Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3

Securing approval for demolition on the Guildhall and Co-op sites and confirmation of the appointed contractor.

Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

Start on site date for the Station Gateway project delayed whilst clarification of funding was outstanding with MHCLG. This has now been received and workstreams are progressing.

Priority 1 - The Economy

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Delivery of major economic growth regeneration projects	Stafford Town Centre Transformation (Future High Street Fund)						
	• Commence work on Station Approach project		X			Works are now scheduled to commence in early 2025	
	• Conclude acquisition of former Co-operative department store		X			Contracts exchanged/completed in November 2024.	
	• Secure planning consents for demolition of Guildhall Shopping Centre and former Co-operative department store			X		Planning consent was issued on 17 October 2024 in respect of the partial demolition of the Guildhall and prior approval for partial demolition of the former Co-op was issued on 5 September 2014.	
	• Commence demolition works to Guildhall Shopping Centre			X		Contractors Cawarden were appointed in October 2024.	
• Commence demolition works to former Co-operative department store			X		Contractors Cawarden were appointed in October 2024		

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify development delivery route for cleared Guildhall and Co-op sites including delivery model, scheme development mix, funding model and procurement and details of public consultation 				X		
	Stafford Station Gateway						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Programme Board and governance arrangements 		X			Confirmation of the funding award from MHCLG was received during December 2024 enabling Memorandum of Understanding to be issued by MHCLG and work to progress on the governance arrangements	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquisition of commercial interests (subject to confirmation of Levelling Up Funding award from MHCLG) 			X		This was paused due to the delay in MHCLG confirmation of the funding award which was received during December 2024 enabling work to progress in Q4	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence remediation works on site (subject to confirmation of Levelling Up Funding award from MHCLG) 				X		

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	UK Shared Prosperity Fund						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and deliver the UKSPF projects in year 3 of the Council's approved Investment Plan, working towards full allocation of spend by 31 March 2025 and delivery of outputs 				X		
Local Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation response & local impacts 		X			Consultation response submitted	★
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of evidence base for new Local Plan Review approach to Development Strategy for new Local Plan 			X		Assessment of evidence base completed NPPF published 12 December 2024. Review of development strategy progressing	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) and Local Plan resource requirements including evidence base Agree approach to Design Coding and Conservation Area Appraisals 				X		

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Development Management service improvement and transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-introduce pre-application advice on a chargeable basis 			X		Cabinet approval to re-introduce pre-application obtained on 5 December 2024.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission External review of Development Management service 		X			Consultant has been appointed following a competitive procurement exercise.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete External review of Development Management service and development of improvement service delivery plan 			X		Work on the review is well underway with the appointed consultant (Mondrem) completing the majority of stakeholder / customer interviews. Furthermore, a baseline assessment of performance, processes, operating model, staffing and budgets is being undertaken. The review is expected to be completed during Q4 with a report setting out recommendations and an improvement plan presented for consideration.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Planning system scoping and specification 				X		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review planning enforcement service provision and protocols/ policy 				X		

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Planning Obligations - Review of Policy and Allocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charging schedules for Section 106 and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) monitoring fees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cabinet approval Implementation 		X	X		<p>BNG monitoring fees approved at Cabinet.</p> <p>S106 charging schedule approved by Cabinet.</p> <p>Implementation through Fees and Charges 2025/2026</p>	 
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Exacom system for BNG 			X		Subject to budget setting process ahead of delivery	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Obligations Working Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish group and terms of reference Agree governance and schedule of meetings 		X			<p>Report to return to Leadership Team but has not been signed off by Finance. Still awaiting comments.</p> <p>Governance and meeting schedule to follow once report signed off.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme and Project Allocations including Cannock Chase SAC and Leisure through updated evidence base 					X	
Land Charges	Full review of Land Charges service to include a review of current processes and IT system		X			Land Charges service review complete. Review of IT systems carried out and	

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
						recommendations made for replacement system.	
	Transformation of Land Charges scoped and timeline in place to drive this forward			X		Project plan for transformation and new IT system requirements in place.	★
	Procure replacement IT System				X		
	Working towards transformed service				X		

Priority Delivery Plan for 2024-25

Priority 2 - The Community

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

Quarter					N/A	Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	Not Applicable	
1&2	4		1			5
3	3	3			1	7
4						12
TOTAL	7 (59%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)		1 (8%)	12 up to Q3

Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3

The waste collection service has been reviewed inline with the results of the recently published (Summer 2024) final version of the Resources and Waste Strategy 2018. With the exception of the new national statutory requirement for weekly food waste collections, the changes required to the current collection service/materials are relatively minor and will be completed as part of the normal contracting process/negotiations, and as such are considered as little more than 'business as usual'. Councils across England are still awaiting details of the new burdens' 'revenue' funding for the introduction of the new food waste service but it has been made clear that all Councils are expected to begin collections from April 2026 regardless of the funding.

The review of play areas across the borough has taken place and the data has been collated. That data will be used in the creation of the report to Cabinet on an agreed cyclical/rolling programme of play areas improvements that will cover several years.

Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

Priority 2 - The Community

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Housing and Homelessness Strategy and approach to building new Council homes	Prepare documents to commission Stafford Housing Strategy including approach to developing Council Housing			X		Draft documents have been prepared in order to commission a housing strategy	★
	Start procurement for Stafford Housing Strategy				X		
	Prepare documents to commission consultants to scope the feasibility of a housing development on Council owned land			X		Draft documents have been prepared to commission consultants to scope the feasibility of developing housing on Council owned land	★
	Start procurement to scope the feasibility of development on a Council owned site				X		
	Completion of Stafford Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy				X		
Review of the Leisure, Culture and Heritage Contract	Finalise Freedom Leisure Strategic Partnership Plan				X		
Design and Deliver Stafford Borough's approach to Health	Complete delivery of health inequalities funded projects		X			All funded projects successfully completed.	★

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	Evaluation of health inequalities funded projects to inform future activity			X		Evaluations completed in quarter 3 and presentation to Community Wellbeing Scrutiny on 15 January 2025 detailing the projects and what was achieved.	★
	Commence work on drafting Community Wellbeing Strategy, setting out priorities across community safety and health				X		
Waste and Recycling - Kerbside collection contract (2025-2032)	Review current waste collection service			X		Waste collection service has been reviewed with reference to compliance with the with the final version of the Resources and Waste Strategy 2018, published in 2024. The overall minor required amendments will be made as part of / following contract negotiation.	✓
	Review potential extension options with incumbent waste collection contractor				X		
	Report to Cabinet on extension option or re-procurement requirement				X		
Waste and Recycling - Introduction of mandatory food waste kerbside collections [* denotes	Design of new service model and discussions with contractor			X		Cabinet briefing has been prepared, to be delivered at the start of Q4 on the proposed new service provision and operation and discussions ongoing with the incumbent contractor	✓

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
action subject to confirmation of government funding settlement]	Consider and action revenue settlement offered by Government			X*		Still awaiting revenue settlement from Government	N/A
	Cabinet approval for new service, start date, and permission to spend				X*		
	Prepare to tender for the procurement of food waste caddies				X*		
Tree Management (OP3)	Review current services and establish requirements (including Tree Protection Orders)				X		
Play Area/Parks Improvements (OP4)	Review condition of current play areas and funding availability for improvements and cyclical maintenance			X		Play area review has been undertaken by officers and the data processed. The processed data will be used to create and inform the play area improvement programme that is intended to be taken to Cabinet during Q4	
	Create improvement programme				X		
Private Water Supply (OP6)	Review of current position	X				Review undertaken, follow up carried out on audit reports to understand current position of the service to facilitate required changes	

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	Ensure staff have undergone training and are certified competent to deliver this testing regime	X				Water sampling training completed by 2 members of staff, who are now competent to carry out water sampling activities	★
	Formulate a delivery plan for testing for all supplies due to be tested		X			Delivery Plan has been formulated and high-risk supplies identified. Specialist contractor commissioned to lead on complex supplies will commence sampling in Q3	★
	Commence testing program		X			Risk assessment commenced during Q3, and testing will follow this process. We were unable to engage the contractors required until late in Q3 and early in Q4	✘
	Complete testing program for 24/5. Plan program from 25/6				X		

Priority Delivery Plan for 2024-25

Priority 3 - Climate Change

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

Quarter					Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	
1 and 2					0
3			3		3
4					0
TOTAL			3		3 due to Q3

Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3

N/A

Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

There has been a delay in finalising the climate change strategy to allow Keele University to review and comment on it before it is brought to Cabinet for approval.

Priority 3 - Climate Change

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Climate Change Strategy	Revised Climate Change Strategy developed and in place			X		There has been a delay to allow Keele University to review and comment on the strategy to ensure a robust approach from the Council. There is an expectation that revisions will be made and the strategy will be then brought to Cabinet.	
	Recruitment of staff to support delivery of strategy and monitor operational delivery			X		Recruitment will take place once the strategy is in place.	
	New Governance Structure in place to track operational delivery			X		To be completed once the strategy is in place.	

Priority Delivery Plan for 2024-25

Priority 4 - The Council

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

Quarter					Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	
1&2	6	2			8
3	1	2	1		4
4					5
TOTAL	7 (59%)	4 (33%)	1 (8%)		12 to end Q3

Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3

The key success in Quarter 3 include:

- The completion of the accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23 which was a substantial piece of work;
- The approval of the transformation and digital strategies

Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

There has been some slippage on the scoping of the transformation work, but this is in progress and is due to be completed in quarter 4.

Priority 4 - The Council

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
Closure of the Accounts	Closure of the accounts 23/24				X		
	Catch up on closure of previous years accounts			X		The accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23 have been completed	★
Transformation Strategy and Plan	Approval of the Transformation Strategy and Plan		X			The strategy has been approved by Cabinet (5 December 2024)	★
	Brief Senior Management Team on the strategy		X			Completed	★
	Complete scoping work to support development of the Transformation work programme			X		Work has commenced and is due to be completed in quarter 4	▲
	Develop the Transformation work programme				X		
Digital Strategy	Finalise the digital technology strategy		X			The strategy has been approved by Cabinet (5 December 2024)	★
	Procurement of switches for Infrastructure Upgrade	X				Procurement completed.	★

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	Plan for installation of new switches		X			Planning and preparation work is nearly complete. The switches have been configured and the risk assessments for installation completed. Installation due to commence in quarter 4	✓
	Installation of new switches				X		
	Identify IT systems in need of replacing over next 3 years		X			Completed - systems have been identified	★
	Assessment and prioritisation of systems to be replaced		X			The list of systems to be replaced has been reviewed and priorities agreed for the next 3 years.	★
	Technology Board to approve systems to be replaced			X		To be discussed and agreed with Leadership Team 21 January 2025	✓
	Note - Project plans will be developed for each system once prioritisation has been agreed and the PDP will be updated accordingly						
Strategic asset management including the review of key assets	Corporate Assets ICT System						
	Research Systems available		X			Alternative systems are being explored - 2 systems demos have been completed	✓

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	Draft specification for new system				X		
	Insurance Reinstatement Valuations						
	Secure Budget			X		Agreed, subject to business case	
	Commission Service Provider to complete Valuations				X		

90% Summary of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2024/25 - as at end of Quarter 3

Symbol	Description	The Economy	The Community	The Council	Total
	Performance exceeds target	4	7	4	15
	Performance on target		3	1	4
	Performance < 5% below target	2	1	1	4
	Performance > 5% below target	1		1	2
N/A	Reported Annually / Not Applicable		8	6	14
	TOTAL	7	19	13	39

KPIs for Business Objective 1 - The Economy

Symbol	Description	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	End of Year
	Performance exceeds target	5	4		
	Performance on target				
	Performance < 5% below target	1	2		
	Performance > 5% below target	1	1		
N/A	Reported Annually / Not Applicable				
	TOTAL	7	7		

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Planning									
Major Planning Applications determined within time	91.89%	60%	80%	87.5%	100%			★	
Non-major Planning Applications determined within time	78.56%	70%	87.3%	86.1%	82.2%			★	
Major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined	New	< 10%	1.7%	1.5%				★	Calculation is rolling 2 year period to Q2 24/25 published a quarter in arrears Q2 figures have been corrected. Figures for Q3 will be published in Q4.
Non-major Planning Applications overturned at appeals as percentage of no. applications determined	New	< 10%	1.4%	1.4%				★	Calculation is rolling 2 year period to Q2 24/25 published a quarter in arrears Q2 figures have been corrected. Figures for Q3 will be published in Q4.

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Building Control									
Applications registered and acknowledged within 3 days of valid receipt	98%	95%	94%	92%	90%				
Full plans applications with initial full assessment within 15 days of valid receipt	85%	80%	78%	87%	62%				The performance is due to staff shortages. Statutory deadlines were achieved.
Customers satisfied or very satisfied with the service	85%	90%	100%	80%	89%				

KPIs for Business Objective 2 - The Community

Symbol	Description	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	End of Year
	Performance exceeds target	5	7		
	Performance on target	3	3		
	Performance < 5% below target	4	1		
	Performance > 5% below target	1			
N/A	Reported Annually / Not Applicable	6	8		
	TOTAL	19	19		

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Operations - Waste and Recycling									
% collections completed first time	NEW	99.90%	99.96%	99.97%	99.98%			★	
Number of missed bin collections (including assisted)/100,000/qtr.	NEW	<40 per 100,000	44 per 100,000	36 per 100,000	22 per 100,000			★	1,023,000 collections/qtr.(avg)
% Household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting	45.4%	48%	52.17%	50.04%	44.06%			✓	Q3 lower due to reduced garden waste tonnages in winter
Amount of household residual waste collected per household (Kgs)	109.68 kgs / per qtr.	<448 kgs or 110 kgs / qtr.	109.09 kgs	107.51 kgs	108.30 kgs			✓	Target format changed from per quarter to annual total for consistency
Operations - Streetscene									
% residents' satisfied with the appearance of town centres (Stafford/Stone)	97%	90%	95%	93%	93%			★	Surveys taken from customers making contact with the Council

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Environmental Health									
% of food businesses inspected	New	100%	27%	45%	73%				Small numbers involved
% of food businesses inspected which are broadly compliant (rating of 3 or better)	New	N/A	95%	95%	93%			N/A	This is a measure, not a target
% of service requests responded to within target (all service areas)	New	95%	92%	90%	95%				
% Environmental Protection Act permitted processes inspected in line with risk rating	New	100%						N/A Annual Target	
% Taxi/PHV fleet inspected	New	90%	27%	41%	79%				
% Taxi/PHV fleet compliant	New	90%	82%	86%	83%			N/A	This is a measure, not a target
% of eligible private water supplies tested and follow up actions completed	New	100%	N/A	N/A				N/A annual target	Specialist contractor to be engaged from Q3 to undertake high risk inspections during Q3/4

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Leisure									
Annual Report from Freedom Leisure setting out the performance of all facilities, including comparison to previous years as well as narrative on the wider wellbeing work and events they facilitate.								N/A	Annual report only
Housing Assistance									
No of DFGs completed		125	21	42	42			★	Quarterly Targets: 20, 30, 30, 45 And annual report with wider data.
Strategic Housing and Homelessness									
% households had a positive outcome and secured accommodation for 6 + months	New	41%	57%	60%	67%			★	Target compared to previous quarters national average
Delivery of affordable housing per year working with Registered Providers, Developers and Homes England		210 homes						N/A	Annual figure rather than quarterly reporting

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Community Safety and Partnerships									
Number of residents/cases dealt with via the CAB	New	N/A	689	656	649			N/A	Contextual information only
Total value of financial outcomes achieved as a result of the CAB contract	New	N/A Measure only	£1,476,609	£1,056,239	£804,491			N/A	
Community Safety Partnership Hub referrals and case closures within 3 months	New	90% closed within 3 months	32 referrals 91% closed	31 referrals 85% closed	42 referrals 93% closed			★	This can be a measure of effectiveness - i.e. resolution provided or “managed risk” achieved. Some cases, however, require more significant work to reach this point, and need to remain open longer.

KPIs for Business Objective 4 - The Council

Symbol	Description	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	End of Year
	Performance exceeds target	3	4		
	Performance on target		1		
	Performance < 5% below target	3	1		
	Performance > 5% below target	1	1		
N/A	Reported Annually / Not Applicable	6	6		
	TOTAL	13	13		

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Local Taxation and Benefits									
Days taken to process new HB/CT Claims	29.1	20 days	27.6	20.8	16.1			★	
Days taken to process new HB/CT change of circumstances	7.1	9 days	8.3	3.3	4.3			★	
% of Council Tax collected annually	97.6%	98% by year end	28.8%	55.8%	83.1%			✓	
% National non-domestic rates (NNDR) collected	97.9%	98% by year end	31.2%	59.1%	83.0%			▲	This performance is 0.8% lower than the corresponding period in 2023-24. It seems to be caused in part by changes to large properties earlier in the year and the effect on their instalments. The shortfall against prior year collection is reducing each month and hopefully will be removed in q4.
Transformation and Assurance									
% of calls answered	92%	94%	95.8%	97.8%	97.2%			★	
Average call wait time	1.42	2 min	1.07	0.38	00.40			★	

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
Number of calls answered	New	N/A	14,747	14,134	14,438			N/A	This is not a measure but gives context to the performance in call handling
Law and Governance									
FOI requests within time i.e. 20 working days	New	85%	77%	76%	78.1%				Long term sickness affected performance but should not be a factor in future periods.
Corporate Assets									
% of buildings with a valid annual landlord Gas Safety Record	New	100%						N/A	Annual KPI
% of buildings with a valid Electrical Certificate (within 5 years)	New	100%						N/A	Annual KPI
% of passenger lifts that have a valid 6 monthly thorough examination record	New	100%						N/A	Annual KPI
% of buildings that have a current Legionella risk assessment	New	100%						N/A	Annual KPI
% of buildings that have a current Fire risk assessment	New	100%						N/A	Annual KPI

Agenda Item 4(b)iii**Committee Cycle 2025/26**

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Report of:	Head of Law and Governance
Portfolio:	Resources Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider the proposed Committee Cycle for 2025/26.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee Cycle for 2025/26 be approved.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.2 The Committee Cycle for 2025/26 has been produced on the basis of the current committee structure, and a similar basis to 2024/25. It also provides for the process leading to the 2026/27 budget.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Once again, timing of the Scrutiny Committees has been arranged in order to coincide with the production of performance and budgetary information. This enables the Scrutiny Committees to look at more current information with a view to taking more timely action, where necessary.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Committee Cycle will assist the Council to support all Corporate Priorities.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The proposed Committee Cycle for 2025/26 is attached as an **APPENDIX**.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

None

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

None

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix: Yearly Committee Cycle 2025-2026

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

None

Contact Officer: Jackie Allen

Telephone Number: 01785 619552

Ward Interest: Nil

Report Track: Cabinet 6 March 2025 (Only)

Key Decision: No

Yearly Committee Cycle

2025 - 2026



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June	1
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December	6
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February	8
March	8
April	9
May	10
NOTE: School Holidays 2025-2026	11

Please Note: All meetings start at 6.30pm unless otherwise indicated

2025

May

Thursday	1	County Council Election
Friday	2	
Saturday	3	
<hr/>		
Sunday	4	
Monday	5	May Day
Tuesday	6	
Wednesday	7	
Thursday	8	Cabinet
Friday	9	
Saturday	10	
<hr/>		
Sunday	11	
Monday	12	
Tuesday	13	
Wednesday	14	Planning Committee
Thursday	15	
Friday	16	
Saturday	17	Council (Mayor Making) 10.30am
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Sunday	18	
Monday	19	Council (Appointments) 7pm
Tuesday	20	
Wednesday	21	
Thursday	22	
Friday	23	
Saturday	24	
<hr/>		
Sunday	25	
Monday	26	Spring Bank Holiday
Tuesday	27	
Wednesday	28	
Thursday	29	Cabinet
Friday	30	
Saturday	31	

June

Sunday	1	
Monday	2	
Tuesday	3	
Wednesday	4	Planning Committee

Thursday 5
 Friday 6
 Saturday 7

Sunday 8
 Monday 9
 Tuesday 10
 Wednesday 11
 Thursday 12
 Friday 13
 Saturday 14

Sunday 15
 Monday 16
 Tuesday 17 Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
 Wednesday 18 Audit and Accounts
 Thursday 19
 Friday 20
 Saturday 21

Sunday 22
 Monday 23
 Tuesday 24 Resources Scrutiny Committee
 Wednesday 25 Planning Committee
 Thursday 26 Cabinet
 Friday 27
 Saturday 28

Sunday 29
 Monday 30

July

Tuesday 1
 Wednesday 2 Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee
 Thursday 3
 Friday 4
 Saturday 5

Sunday 6
 Monday 7
 Tuesday 8
 Wednesday 9
 Thursday 10
 Friday 11
 Saturday 12

Sunday 13
 Monday 14
 Tuesday 15

Wednesday	16	Planning Committee
Thursday	17	
Friday	18	
Saturday	19	

Sunday	20	
Monday	21	
Tuesday	22	Council 7pm
Wednesday	23	
Thursday	24	Cabinet
Friday	25	
Saturday	26	

Sunday	27	
Monday	28	
Tuesday	29	
Wednesday	30	
Thursday	31	

August

Friday	1	
Saturday	2	

Sunday	3	
Monday	4	
Tuesday	5	
Wednesday	6	Planning Committee
Thursday	7	
Friday	8	
Saturday	9	

Sunday	10	
Monday	11	
Tuesday	12	
Wednesday	13	
Thursday	14	
Friday	15	
Saturday	16	

Sunday	17	
Monday	18	
Tuesday	19	
Wednesday	20	
Thursday	21	
Friday	22	
Saturday	23	

Sunday	24	
Monday	25	Bank Holiday
Tuesday	26	
Wednesday	27	Planning Committee
Thursday	28	Cabinet
Friday	29	
Saturday	30	

Sunday	31	
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September

Monday	1	
Tuesday	2	
Wednesday	3	
Thursday	4	
Friday	5	
Saturday	6	

Sunday	7	
Monday	8	
Tuesday	9	Council 7pm
Wednesday	10	
Thursday	11	
Friday	12	
Saturday	13	

Sunday	14	Battle of Britain Commemoration
Monday	15	
Tuesday	16	
Wednesday	17	Planning Committee
Thursday	18	
Friday	19	
Saturday	20	

Sunday	21	
Monday	22	
Tuesday	23	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday	24	Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Thursday	25	Cabinet
Friday	26	
Saturday	27	

Sunday	28	
Monday	29	
Tuesday	30	Audit and Accounts

October

Wednesday	1	Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee
Thursday	2	
Friday	3	
Saturday	4	

Sunday	5	
Monday	6	
Tuesday	7	
Wednesday	8	Planning Committee
Thursday	9	
Friday	10	
Saturday	11	

Sunday	12	
Monday	13	
Tuesday	14	
Wednesday	15	
Thursday	16	Cabinet
Friday	17	
Saturday	18	

Sunday	19	
Monday	20	
Tuesday	21	
Wednesday	22	
Thursday	23	
Friday	24	
Saturday	25	

Sunday	26	
Monday	27	
Tuesday	28	
Wednesday	29	Planning Committee
Thursday	30	
Friday	31	

November

Saturday	1	
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Sunday	2	
Monday	3	
Tuesday	4	
Wednesday	5	
Thursday	6	
Friday	7	
Saturday	8	

Sunday	9	Remembrance Sunday
Monday	10	
Tuesday	11	Act of Remembrance
Wednesday	12	
Thursday	13	Cabinet
Friday	14	
Saturday	15	

Sunday	16	
Monday	17	
Tuesday	18	
Wednesday	19	Planning Committee
Thursday	20	
Friday	21	
Saturday	22	

Sunday	23	
Monday	24	
Tuesday	25	
Wednesday	26	
Thursday	27	
Friday	28	
Saturday	29	

Sunday	30	
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December

Monday	1	
Tuesday	2	Council 7pm
Wednesday	3	
Thursday	4	Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Friday	5	
Saturday	6	

Sunday	7	
Monday	8	
Tuesday	9	Audit and Accounts
Wednesday	10	Planning Committee
Thursday	11	Cabinet
Friday	12	
Saturday	13	

Sunday	14	
Monday	15	
Tuesday	16	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday	17	
Thursday	18	Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee
Friday	19	
Saturday	20	

Sunday	21	Civic Carol Service
Monday	22	
Tuesday	23	
Wednesday	24	
Thursday	25	Christmas Day
Friday	26	Boxing Day
Saturday	27	

Sunday	28	
Monday	29	
Tuesday	30	
Wednesday	31	

2026

January

Thursday	1	New Year's Day
Friday	2	
Saturday	3	

Sunday	4	
Monday	5	
Tuesday	6	
Wednesday	7	Planning Committee
Thursday	8	Cabinet Briefing (Budget)
Friday	9	
Saturday	10	

Sunday	11	
Monday	12	
Tuesday	13	
Wednesday	14	
Thursday	15	
Friday	16	
Saturday	17	

Sunday	18	
Monday	19	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Tuesday	20	
Wednesday	21	
Thursday	22	Cabinet (Budget)
Friday	23	
Saturday	24	

Sunday	25	
Monday	26	
Tuesday	27	
Wednesday	28	Planning Committee

Thursday	29
Friday	30
Saturday	31

February

Sunday	1	
Monday	2	
Tuesday	3	
Wednesday	4	
Thursday	5	Audit and Accounts
Friday	6	
Saturday	7	

Sunday	8	
Monday	9	
Tuesday	10	Council 7pm
Wednesday	11	
Thursday	12	
Friday	13	
Saturday	14	

Sunday	15	
Monday	16	
Tuesday	17	Cabinet (Provisional)
Wednesday	18	Planning Committee
Thursday	19	
Friday	20	
Saturday	21	

Sunday	22	
Monday	23	
Tuesday	24	Council 7pm
Wednesday	25	
Thursday	26	
Friday	27	
Saturday	28	

March

Sunday	1
Monday	2
Tuesday	3
Wednesday	4
Thursday	5
Friday	6
Saturday	7

Sunday	8	
Monday	9	
Tuesday	10	
Wednesday	11	Planning Committee
Thursday	12	Cabinet
Friday	13	
Saturday	14	

Sunday	15	
Monday	16	
Tuesday	17	
Wednesday	18	Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
Thursday	19	Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee
Friday	20	
Saturday	21	

Sunday	22	
Monday	23	
Tuesday	24	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday	25	Audit and Accounts
Thursday	26	
Friday	27	
Saturday	28	

Sunday	29	
Monday	30	
Tuesday	31	

April

Wednesday	1	Planning Committee
Thursday	2	
Friday	3	Good Friday
Saturday	4	

Sunday	5	
Monday	6	Easter Monday
Tuesday	7	
Wednesday	8	
Thursday	9	Cabinet
Friday	10	
Saturday	11	

Sunday	12	
Monday	13	
Tuesday	14	Council 7pm
Wednesday	15	
Thursday	16	
Friday	17	
Saturday	18	

Sunday	19	
Monday	20	
Tuesday	21	
Wednesday	22	Planning Committee
Thursday	23	
Friday	24	
Saturday	25	

Sunday	26	
Monday	27	
Tuesday	28	
Wednesday	29	
Thursday	30	

May

Friday	1	
Saturday	2	

Sunday	3	
Monday	4	May Day
Tuesday	5	
Wednesday	6	
Thursday	7	
Friday	8	
Saturday	9	

Sunday	10	
Monday	11	
Tuesday	12	
Wednesday	13	Planning Committee
Thursday	14	
Friday	15	
Saturday	16	Council (Mayor Making) 10.30am

Sunday	17	
Monday	18	Council (Appointments) 7pm
Tuesday	19	
Wednesday	20	
Thursday	21	Cabinet
Friday	22	
Saturday	23	

Sunday	24	
Monday	25	Spring Bank Holiday
Tuesday	26	
Wednesday	27	
Thursday	28	
Friday	29	

Saturday 30

Sunday 31

NOTE: School Holidays 2025-2026

- Monday 5 May 2025 (May Day)
- Monday 26 May - Friday 30 May 2025 (Half Term)
- Tuesday 22 July to Friday 29 August 2025 (Summer Holiday)
- Monday 1 September 2025 (Inset Day)
- Monday 27 October - Friday 31 October 2025 (Half Term)
- Monday 22 December 2025 - Friday 2 January 2026 (Christmas Holiday)
- Monday 16 February - Friday 20 February 2026 (Half Term)
- Monday 30 March - Friday 10 April 2026 (Easter Holiday)
- Monday 4 May 2026 (May Day)
- Monday 25 May - Friday 29 May 2026 (Half Term)

Agenda Item 4(b)iv**Revenues and Benefits Collection Report - Quarter 3**

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Report of:	Deputy Chief Executive - Resources
Portfolio:	Resources Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Service as regards:
- The collection of Council Tax during the first three quarters of the financial year.
 - The collection of Business Rates during the three quarters of the financial year.
 - The recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit during the first three quarters of the financial year.
- 1.2 To seek approval to the write off of the arrears listed in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDICES**.

2 Reason(s) for Report being 'Not for Publication'

- 2.1 In accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the report is considered 'not for publication' under the following categories of exemption:
- Exempt Paragraph 1 - Information relating to any individual.
 - Exempt Paragraph 2 - Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
 - Exempt Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That the information regarding collections be noted.
- 3.2 That the arrears listed in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDICES** be written off.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.3 Efficient collection of the Council's revenues is of major importance to the funding of Council services and those provided by our preceptors.
- 3.4 Whilst our collection rates are traditionally good, regrettably not all of the monies owed to the Council can be collected and this report contains a recommendation to write off bad debts which cannot be recovered.

4 Key Issues

- 4.1 Council Tax due for the 2024/2025 year amounts to £105.3M of which some **83.1%** was collected by the end of December. This is the same as last year's performance in the same period (83.1%).
- 4.2 Business Rates due for the current year amounts to £55.9M of which some **83.0%** was collected by the end of December, showing a slight decrease on the previous year (83.8%).

5 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 5.1 Not Applicable

6 Report Detail

Council Tax

- 6.1 Council Tax is collected on behalf of the District Council, Parish Councils and our Major Preceptors (Staffordshire County Council and Commissioner for Police, Crime, Fire and Rescue). The effect of the Collection fund arrangements means that Stafford Borough Council retains around 10% of the council tax collected.
- 6.2 Council Tax due for the current year amounted to £105.3M and we have collected 83.1% of this within the first three quarters of the year. This is the same as last year's performance, though is slightly lower than pre-pandemic levels (84.3% in the same period of 2019/20). This would seem to indicate that we are making progress with our recovery processes but have a little way to go before reaching pre-covid levels.
- 6.3 In accordance with the Council's approved policies, all reasonable and lawful attempts are made to recover all amounts due. In the first instance this involves the issue of bills, reminders and final notices, followed by Summonses in the Magistrates Court where the warning notices are not effective. At all stages of this process, debtors are encouraged to engage in voluntary arrangements to repay their arrears, to prevent the need for formal action.

Where necessary and when Liability Orders are granted by Magistrates, the Council uses its powers to make deductions from earnings and benefits of debtors, where it can, and instructs Enforcement Agents where such deductions are not possible or appropriate.

In the most severe cases and for debts exceeding £5,000, the Council will consider personal bankruptcy action against individuals.

- 6.4 The recovery powers available to the Council are considerable but not completely infallible. There are occasions when bills are not paid and the debts cannot be recovered.
- 6.5 Statutory safeguards such as Debt Relief Orders, Individual's Voluntary Arrangements exist to protect debtors suffering hardship, to attempt to the expensive, stressful and sometimes ineffective process of personal bankruptcy. Where a debt is included in such an instrument, or when a debtor is bankrupt, our ordinary recovery powers cannot be used.
- 6.6 For any of our powers to be effective we need to know the whereabouts of a debtor, and this is not always the case. Where debtors abscond, we will use all reasonable endeavours to trace them and are often successful in doing so. Unfortunately, on occasions this is not so and we must submit a debt for write off.

Our trace procedures include:

- Checking our internal Council systems and following any information which may help us to trace the debtor.
- Use of credit reference agency data.
- Trace and collect facilities offered by our Enforcement Agencies
- Visits to the last known address by the Council's Property Inspector and use of external tracing agents.

Unfortunately, legislation does not currently permit access to DWP or HMRC records to trace Council Tax debtors or their employers, though a Cabinet Office project is currently reviewing this.

Data protection legislation allows us to receive information as to a debtor's whereabouts, but we cannot disclose information to other creditors. Reciprocal arrangements with utility companies and similar are not therefore workable.

- 6.7 There are no irrecoverable council tax debts listed in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX** to this report.

Business Rates

- 6.8 Business Rates due for the current year amounts to £55.9M of which some **83.1%** was collected by the end of December. This compares to 83.8% collected in the same period last year. There is no obvious single reason for this marginal reduction as recovery action has been taken against defaulters in the usual way. Officers will work hard to try to reverse the dip, in the last quarter of the year.
- 6.9 The recovery powers available to us are again contained in the Council's approved policies and are used in full. Those powers and our procedures are similar to the council tax powers described above, with the exception that deductions from individuals' benefits and earnings are not permissible, even if the debtor is an individual.
- 6.10 Where rates are owed by an individual, similar safeguards exist for the debtors and trace facilities are used by the Council for absconding debtors, as described above.
- 6.11 Additionally, in the case of business rates, as has been reported to Cabinet previously, our collection efforts are sometimes frustrated by weaknesses in legislation. Rates are due from the occupiers rather than the owners of property and where the occupier is a company, we can only recover from that company. Some proprietors will strip a company of its assets, or dissolve the company before we have had an opportunity to implement our recovery procedures. A new company is then formed in a similar style, to trade from the same premises.

Central Government has previously undertaken to review the loopholes that exist in rating and company legislation, though no changes have yet been received. Officers continue to actively monitor these issues.

- 6.12 4 irrecoverable business rate debt in the sum of £82,625.34 are listed in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX** to this report.

Housing Benefit Overpayments

- 6.13 The Council manages the Housing Benefit scheme on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, who fund the cost of benefits paid to claimants.
- 6.14 Sometimes a claimant will be paid too much Housing Benefit, for example when the Council does not become aware of a change of circumstances until after the claimant has been paid the benefit. This is called an Overpayment of Housing Benefit. The Council is expected to recover these overpayments from the claimant in all but a few limited circumstances. DWP will fund only 40% of benefit which is overpaid as a result of claimant error or fraud.
- 6.15 Where an overpayment occurs as a result of a local authority error, DWP will provide 100% funding provided our error rate remains below a threshold of 0.48% of benefit paid, as it has routinely done for many years.

- 6.16 Recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit continues to progress well, with some £321K being collected in the first three quarters of the financial year.
- 6.17 There are no irrecoverable Benefit Overpayment debts included in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX** to this report.

7 Implications

7.1 Financial

Council Tax write offs are losses to the Collection Fund and, as such, form part of the cost of collection incurred by this Council. There are no Council Tax write offs on this report.

The amounts being recommended are well below the value of the bad debt provision, which the Council includes within its accounts in expectation that some amounts owed will not be paid and cannot be recovered.

The cost of collecting the debts has been considered as part of the decision to put them forward for write off. If further information does come forward about the whereabouts of any of the individual debtors the Council will pursue recovery action.

Cabinet are asked to write off the debts as they are considered to be irrecoverable for the reasons given in the appendices. The debts remain legally due to the Council and should the circumstances causing the write off in any particular case, subsequently change, recovery action may be recommended.

7.2 Legal

Cabinet are asked to write off the debts as they are considered to be irrecoverable for the reasons given in the appendices. The debts remain legally due to the Council and should the circumstances causing the write off in any particular case, subsequently change, recovery action may be recommended.

7.3 Human Resources

None

7.4 Risk Management

None

7.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

7.6 Health

None

7.7 Climate Change

None

8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Business Rates to be considered for Write Off

9 Previous Consideration

None

10 Background Papers

None

Contact Officer: Rob Wolfe

Telephone Number: 01543 464 397

Ward Interest: None

Report Track: Cabinet - 6 March 2025 (Only)

Key Decision: No

Agenda Item 4(c)i

National Planning Policy Framework and New Local Plan: Next Steps

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Report of:	Head of Economic Development and Planning
Portfolio:	Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 For Cabinet Members to consider the new requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024 regarding progress of the New Local Plan 2020-2040.
- 1.2 Having considered the new requirements of the NPPF, to recommend stopping work on the New Local Plan 2020-2040 and begin investigation of, and to develop a new plan, at a later date, under the new plan system in accordance with Section 3 and **ANNEX 1** of the NPPF.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To stop work on the current New Local Plan 2020-2040 and begin the process of advanced work prior to the official start of a new plan under the new plan system, covering a plan period 2025-2045.
- 2.2 To approve a new Local Development Scheme (Local Plan timetable) based on the latest information available from the Government, to be submitted and brought into effect from 19 March 2025. This will be reviewed when further details of the new plan-making system are published.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The current new Local Plan 2020-2040 completed the Preferred Options stage in October to December 2022. Officers have reviewed and assessed the responses received through the public consultation at this stage.
- 3.2 The responses highlighted several factors that will have implications for the new Local Plan, in particular the requirement to source further work to create a sound evidence base for the plan, as well as concern regarding the

provision of additional dwellings for unmet need from neighbouring authorities as part of the future Stafford Borough development strategy.

- 3.3 Alongside the responses to the Preferred Options consultation, the Government, both previous and existing, announced changes to National planning policy. These changes will impact Local Plans and plan-making, by introducing a new plan-making process, as well as amending some of the current requirements for Local Plans, including the abolishment of the Duty-to-Cooperate. Further details are anticipated in the Summer 2025.

4 Relationship to Corporate Business Objectives

- 4.1 The New Local Plan will help deliver the Council's Corporate Business Plan 2021-2024 key objectives:

"To deliver sustainable economic and housing growth to provide income and jobs."

"To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean, attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing strong communities that promote health and wellbeing."

"To continue work towards our Climate Change and Green Recovery objectives, integrating them into our activities and strategic plans"

"To be a well-run, financially sustainable and ambitious organisation, responsive to the needs of our customers and communities and focussed on delivering our objectives."

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The production of a Local Plan is a requirement of the Town and Country Planning Acts.
- 5.2 The New Local Plan 2025-2045 will provide clear guidance to developers, and members of the public, through planning policies and proposals across the Borough. This will enable any resident or business to see the requirements related to future development.
- 5.3 The development of the Local Plan is identified as a corporate priority project.

New Local Plan stages

- 5.4 The adopted Plan for Stafford Borough (June 2014 and Part 2 in January 2017) covers the period 2011-2031. Councils must review their Local Plans at least once every five years from the adoption date to ensure that policies remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community.

- 5.5 Stafford Borough Council began the process of making the new Stafford Borough Local Plan in July 2017 which would update and replace the adopted Local Plan and cover the period 2020-2040.
- 5.6 The plan-making process consists of several key stages. Councils must set out target dates for meeting them in a Local Development Scheme (LDS). Stafford Borough's LDS was last published in October 2022.
- 5.7 Before a new Local Plan can be adopted, it must go through an examination process administered by the Planning Inspectorate National Service (PINS). The examination will assess whether the new Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and if the document is sound. As set out in paragraph 36 of the NPPF, the new Local Plan must therefore be:
- Positively prepared - providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
 - Justified - an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence.
 - Effective - deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
 - Consistent with national policy - enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.
- 5.8 The Preferred Options stage of the New Local Plan, which constituted a draft of a new Local Plan, included new draft policies and sets out how many new dwellings and how much new employment land is to be delivered between 2020-2040, as well as identifies proposed sites where new homes, employment and other facilities could be located.
- 5.9 This stage was publicly consulted upon from October 2022 to 12 December 2022.
- 5.10 The process has continued to progress but needs to take into account national planning system changes and local changes in administration to ensure any future plan would be sound when it came before examination.

National Changes

Levelling up and Regeneration Bill

- 5.11 Between December 2022 and March 2023 a consultation was held on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy. It was within this consultation that the proposal of a new plan making system was put forward. The Bill became an Act in October 2023.
- 5.12 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 states that a new 30-month plan making process will be implemented. Precise detail on what the new plan system will involve is still awaited and anticipated in Summer 2025, however we know that the new system will have:
- 30-month timeframe to complete a new plan from start to adoption
 - Upfront engagement with local communities and stakeholders
 - Gateway Assessments: 1st and 2nd Gateway Assessments are advisory. 3rd Gateway Assessment will have a binding role as to whether the planning authority can submit their draft plan.
- 5.13 Further detail on plan making is set out within Section 3 of the NPPF, published in December 2024, and **ANNEX 1: Implementation**. It states that for the purpose of plan-making, policies in this version of the NPPF will apply from 12 March 2025, although being a material consideration in dealing with planning applications from the day of its publication.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.14 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated on 12 December 2024. There have been several significant changes through the NPPF, which will have implications on how a local plan is developed. In particular the Government has now introduced new mandatory housing targets and evidence based requirements. Further changes relate to:
- Strategic Planning
 - Standard Method for assessing local housing need
 - Five-year Housing Land Supply changes
 - Affordable housing - social rent
 - New land classification: Brownfield, Grey Belt and Green Belt
 - Design Coding
 - Increased density and building heights
 - National Development Management Policies
- 5.15 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 abolishes the principle of the Duty to Cooperate which requires Local Planning Authorities to co-operate with each other through the plan making system. However, the Duty remains a policy requirement under NPPF paragraph 24. This requirement is to be

strengthened by the proposal of new mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning as required to deliver growth.

Devolution White Paper

- 5.16 In addition, on 16 December 2024 the Government published the Devolution White Paper. The devolution framework sets out that there will be three types of Strategic Authorities (these are all combined authorities):
- **Foundation Strategic Authorities** - non-mayoral Combined Authorities (CA), Level 2 County Combined Authorities (CCA), or any local authorities designated as a Strategic Authority without a mayor.
 - **Mayoral Strategic Authorities** - Greater London Authority, Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA) and Mayoral Combined County Authorities (MCCA).
 - **Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities** - any Mayoral Strategic Authorities that meet specific criteria, in particular having had a directly elected mayor for at least 18 months. Initially these will be North East, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region Strategic Authorities.
- 5.17 The White Paper restates Government's ambition that all areas will ultimately have a Mayoral Strategic Authority. In two-tier areas, Government will only establish CCAs for an interim period. Councils in all 21 two-tier areas will be expected to reorganise over this Parliament and the next. The Government intends reorganisation to happen in a phased approach, with the first new unitary councils currently expected to be in place by 2028. Reorganisation is not a requirement for devolution, but the Government has indicated it will prioritise areas where reorganisation can unlock devolution.
- 5.18 The Government has set a clear expectation that new unitary councils should be based on a population size of at least 500,000 people, although it has indicated that consideration will be given to smaller unitary councils on an exceptional basis where there is evidence that this would make sense for a local area.
- 5.19 All areas, regardless of whether they have a Strategic Authority in place, will have to produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). An SDS is a statutory land-use planning document. It will set out an investment framework for building and development across a Strategic Authority's area.
- 5.20 Further details on strategic planning bodies for consideration through section 3.5 of the 'Powers, functions and funding - Devolution Framework' of the English Devolution White Paper.

- 5.21 Strategic planning will play a vital role in delivering sustainable growth and addressing key spatial issues – including meeting housing needs, delivering strategic infrastructure, growing the economy, and improving climate resilience. Strategic planning will also be important in the delivery of Local Growth Plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. It is the Government’s intention to move to a model of universal strategic planning covering functional economic areas within the next five years.
- 5.22 To date no detailed information has been confirmed on how strategic planning will evolve or the transitional arrangements that will be required. Nevertheless this will affect the local plan making system and therefore needs to be considered when further detail is available.
- 5.23 A key change within the NPPF that has a more immediate effect on local plan making and development is the introduction of mandatory housing targets and the methodology used to calculate this.
- 5.24 The previous standard methodology calculated Local Housing Need at 358 per year for Stafford Borough (please note that this figure does change year on year). Whilst the current NPPF does not require a 10% buffer, the Council has historically applied this approach to ensure flexibility and delivery of homes, therefore the local housing need is 394 new homes per year.
- 5.25 In the period of 2020-2024 on average 544 new homes per year were completed.
- 5.26 Paragraph 62 of the NPPF directs that strategic policies should be informed by local housing need assessment conducted using the Government’s standard method. The new methodology results in a mandatory housing target **of 751 dwellings per year** (15,020 over the plan period 2025-2045) for Stafford Borough. When 10% delivery buffer is applied this results in a target of **826 dwellings per year** (16,520 over the plan period).
- 5.27 The considerable uplift of local housing need will have an obvious impact on how Stafford Borough develops in the future and, as such, needs to be reflected in the new Local Plan.
- 5.28 Paragraph 78 of the NPPF requires that local planning authorities (LPAs) have a 5-year land supply. Until the NPPF was published in December 2024 Stafford Borough Council was in a strong position to resist planning applications for areas, or building increased housing numbers, that were not in line with the adopted Plan for Stafford Borough because we could demonstrate a five year land supply. However, when the new Local Housing Need figure is applied the Borough Council now has less than a five year supply of housing land so future planning decision on planning applications must apply the adopted Plan as well as the NPPF’s presumption in favour of sustainable development. The target to be reached for housing supply will increase to six years supply from July 2026.

- 5.29 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF sets out the situation where a Local Planning Authority's delivery falls below the housing requirement over the previous three years. Where the Housing Delivery Test indicates that this is the case, the following policy consequences should apply:
- (a) where delivery falls below 95% of the requirement over the previous three years, the authority should prepare an action plan to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years;
 - (b) where delivery falls below 85% of the requirement over the previous three years, the authority should include a buffer of 20% to their identified supply of specific deliverable sites as set out in paragraph 78 of this framework, in addition to the requirement for an action plan.
 - (c) where delivery falls below 75% of the requirement over the previous three years, the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies, as set out in footnote 8 of this Framework, in addition to the requirements for an action plan and 20% buffer.

Transitional Arrangements

- 5.30 The transitional arrangements set out within the NPPF (**ANNEX 1: Implementation**) states that the policies set out within the NPPF will apply, for the purpose of preparing local plans from 12 March 2025, whilst being material considerations in dealing with planning applications from the publication date (12 December 2024). The Council have not submitted the plan for examination or reached Regulation 19. Additionally, our Local Housing Need figure has had an increase of over 200 dwellings per year. Due to this increase in housing figure, the Borough Council will, in the future, need to introduce new strategic policies to support the increased housing figure. As a result of the latest changes through the NPPF (December 2024) and the scale of new evidence required it would not have been possible to meet the deadlines set by Government to progress through the existing plan-making process. Furthermore, plans being submitted and examined currently will be required to start a new Local Plan based on the new legislation immediately following adoption, in any event.
- 5.31 As mentioned within paragraph 5.12 a new 30-month plan system is anticipated to be put in place and whilst precise details are not yet available the Borough Council have included a draft timeline (Table 1) of how this will apply to our local context. Please note that the Local Development Scheme will need to be updated once further details about the new plan-making system is published by MHCLG in Summer 2025.

5.32 Figure 1 below shows the new plan system. Table 1 shows how this will apply in terms of a timeline.

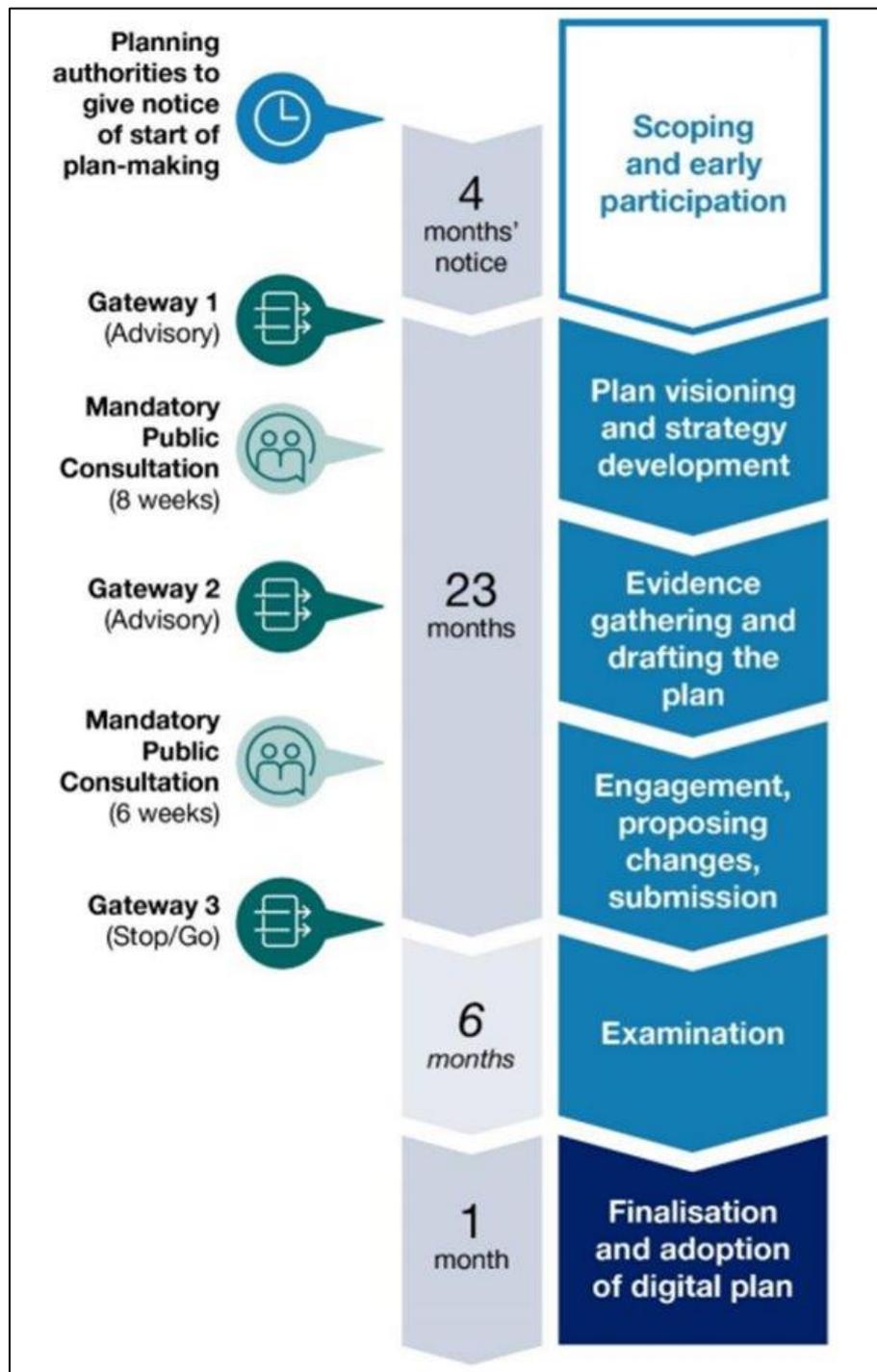


Figure 1: Flow diagram explaining the new 30 month plan system

Table 1: 30 month plan system with provisional dates

Scoping and early participation (intention to start new plan)	September 2025	9 months Not part of the 30 months timetable
4 months notice period of intention to start plan	May 2026	4 months
Gateway 1	September 2026	23 months
Plan visioning and strategy development	September 2026	
Mandatory public consultation (8 weeks)	October- November 2026	
Evidence gathering and drafting the plan	October - December 2026	
Gateway 2	December 2026	
Mandatory public consultation (6 weeks)	January - February 2027	
Engagement, proposing changes, submission	April 2027	
Gateway 3	May 2027	
Examination	June 2027 - November 2027	6 months
Finalisation and adoption of digital plan	November / December 2027	1 month

Evidence base

- 5.33 For any plan to be considered justified and sound it must be supported by a robust and up to date evidence base. Stafford Borough has a strong track record of preparing and adopting effective Local Plan that deliver for the local communities.
- 5.34 Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision, climate change and health outcomes.
- 5.35 It should also be noted that the New Local Plan process sits alongside, and is used to support through its evidence base, a range of strategies that are being progressed by the Council to inform decisions, hence the added value of the Local Plan process.
- 5.36 An evidence base was established for the New Local Plan 2020-2040 with updates required between the Preferred Options stage (Regulation 18) and Regulation 19.
- 5.37 Due to the changes in the local housing requirement, key pieces of work i.e. Economic Housing and Delivery Needs Assessment, Whole Plan Viability Assessment, were identified as requiring an update i.e. using the existing piece of work and simply updating to consider changes that had occurred between Regulation 18 and Regulation 19. These pieces of work, and others, will have to be redone in their entirety due to the national changes alongside additional studies also required, for example the Climate Change study. Some of these studies will take twelve to eighteen months to be completed.
- 5.38 **APPENDIX 1** lists the required documents to ensure a robust evidence base for the new Local Plan process is created.
- 5.39 In conclusion, it is the combination of the uplift in Local Housing Need with the required evidence base, and the imposed deadline for plans under the current system to be submitted that results in the need to begin early pre-scoping work on the new plan system, prior to officially starting a new plan.

Budget

- 5.40 Preparing the New Local Plan is a key corporate project for the Council during the next few years and therefore requires adequate resources to ensure effective delivery and achieving value for money.

- 5.41 As the creation of the Local Plan has been an ongoing process the budget has altered to reflect the changes that have occurred. The current budget asks, taking into account the latest changes, is for £886,229 over the period 2024/2025 to 2027/2028 compared to a reserve position of £247,919 together with £32,500 per year for the next four financial years. Therefore an additional £508,310 budget provision is required to progress the new Local Plan.
- 5.42 It should be noted that the figures set out above at this stage, not including spend to date, for the new Local Plan expenditure amounting to a minimum, and could increase in the future through new Government requirements or external cost factors such as consultancy fees rising.
- 5.43 The importance of progressing with the New Local Plan, through the provision of additional funding resources is crucial, to ensure that decisions on future development proposals are addressed and are actively meeting the needs and opportunities available within the Borough.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

The main costs incurred in preparing and finalising the New Local Plan include the evidence base, community engagement and consultation, and the independent Examination process prior to adoption.

The additional budget requirement of £508,310 over the budget period of 2024/25 to 2027/28 has been built into the proposed budgets approved by Cabinet on 30 January 2025 and Full Council on 11 February 2025.

The budget amounts per year for forecast spend are set out in the table below:

	Budget £'000
2024/25 (Actual Expenditure)	3
Budget 2025/26	478
Budget 2026/27	286
Budget 2027/28	119
Total	886

6.2 Legal

The New Local Plan has to be prepared in accordance with the relevant Planning Acts and regulations, and be aligned with related national planning policy and guidance. The Plan will need in accordance with the Council's constitution to be formally endorsed by Full Council prior to publication and on adoption.

6.3 Human Resources

The New Local Plan will be delivered by existing staff from within Economic Development and Planning, and the wider organisation, together with support from specialist consultants.

6.4 Risk Management

An adopted local plan for Stafford Borough is in place. However, there is a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to review Local Plans and ensure policies are up to date. For plans to be reviewed and kept up to date. A delay and / or uncertainty at the local level without a new Local Plan being produced could lead to legal challenges and/or planning appeals with potential significant costs for the Council.

Whilst the Council will seek to ensure that the New Local Plan is progressed in accordance with the latest timetable and minimise any risks of delay it should be noted that the following external factors are beyond the Council's control and may have an impact:

- Changes in Government legislation, regulations and policy
- Unanticipated scale and nature of consultation responses received including new evidence submitted unexpectedly
- Failure of key partners and other agencies to deliver evidence on time and make responses to key elements of the process
- Unanticipated delays in external events such as resource capacity of the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) for the Examination process or failure to deliver robust arrangements for this process

It should be noted that the following risks can be considered and effectively managed by the Council:

- Staff turnover, recruitment difficulties and sickness absences leading to inadequate skills base
- Political changes, procedural delays or failure to meet Council deadlines
- Non-conformity and failure in the tests of soundness for new planning policy documents

The Council will continue to closely monitor Government legislation, regulations and policy as part of updating the Local Plan whilst deploying robust programme management techniques to deliver evidence as required through the process, including regularly engaging with the Planning Inspectorate. All internal risks will be reviewed when required and proposed actions delivered efficiently.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

The New Local Plan 2025-2045 will provide clear guidance to developers, and also members of the public, through planning policies and proposals in across the Borough. This will enable any resident or business to see the requirements related to future development. There are no direct impacts identified for Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation at this stage.

The New Local Plan will deliver a statutory development plan which is designed to be inclusive to all residents and those interested in planning the future for the Borough.

Throughout the process of preparing the New Local Plan a thorough consultation and engagement process will enable residents and interested parties to be involved in its preparation, including 24/7 access to key documents through the Borough Council's website.

6.6 Health

Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners, ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 with policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision and health outcomes. Specific reference will be made when details of the New Local Plan 2025-2045 are made available.

6.7 Climate Change

Working from a consistent evidence base through the Borough Council and with partners, ensures that recommendations made in relation to the New Local Plan 2025-2045 with policy-specific areas are consistent and complementary to an approach that supports equality in both service provision and climate change outcomes. Specific reference will be made when details of the New Local Plan 2025-2045 are made available.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: New Local Plan evidence base

8 Previous Consideration

6 October 2022 Cabinet Agenda and Minutes via link below:

www.staffordbc.gov.uk/2022-2023-committee-meetings

9 Background Papers

File available in Economic Development and Planning together with the following information available via the Stafford Borough Council website links:

www.staffordbc.gov.uk/local-plan

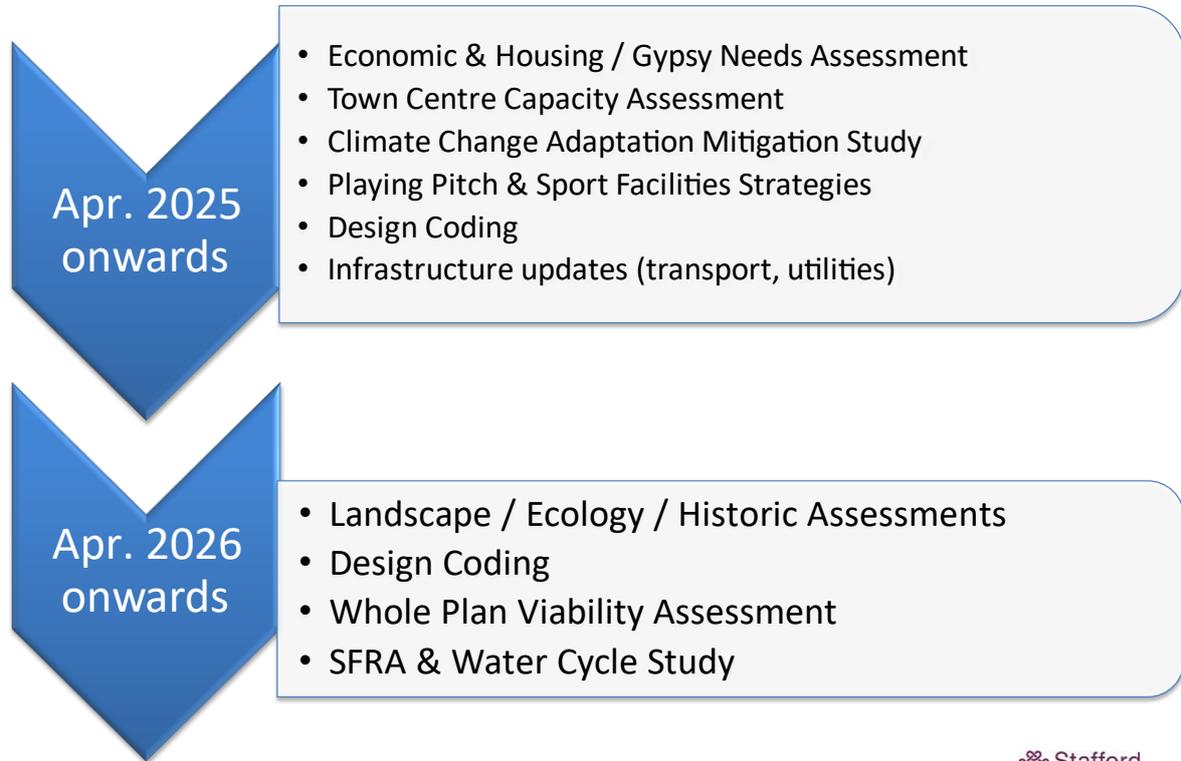
www.staffordbc.gov.uk/meecebrook-new-garden-settlement

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Ward Interest:	All
Report Track:	Cabinet - 6/3/2025 (Only)
Key Decision:	Yes

Appendix 1

Local Plan Evidence Base

Delivering the Evidence Base



Agenda Item 4(d)i**Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030**

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	6 March 2025
Report of:	Head of Wellbeing
Portfolio:	Community Portfolio

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To request approval for the adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030.
- 2.2 To note the content of the Evidence Review which sets out the challenges impacting homelessness and rough sleeping in Stafford Borough.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.3 The existing Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was approved for 2020-2025. Section 1(4) of the Housing Act 2002 requires housing authorities to publish a new homelessness strategy, based on the results of a further homelessness evidence review, every five years.
- 2.4 In Summer 2024, a detailed homeless evidence review was undertaken to inform the priorities for the revised Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, taking into account changes in local context since the previous Strategy.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy sets the Council's priorities to prevent homelessness and where this is not possible, to ensure suitable housing and support is available.

- 3.2 The review of the Strategy builds on six existing priorities (outlined below) and key objectives to achieve these priorities that have been developed to reflect the strategic and operational challenges within the sector. These six priorities, and associated objectives, will direct workstreams associated with homelessness and rough sleeping for the next five years.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Corporate Business Objective 2 *'To improve the quality of life of local people by providing a safe, clean and attractive place to live and work and encouraging people to be engaged in developing resilient communities that promote health and wellbeing.'*

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 (**APPENDIX 1**) has six key priorities to address the challenges that have been identified following the homeless evidence review and consultation with both partner agencies and those with lived experience.
- 5.2 Since the previous evidence review, the number of households approaching Housing Options for advice and support has increased by 120%, with those requiring emergency accommodation increasing by 130%, placing unprecedented demand on the service. In the previous Strategy, 40% of cases presented with a support need - this has increased to 71% with a third of those presenting with three or more needs (referred to as multiple and complex needs).
- 5.3 The majority of households accessing Housing Options are single people and the main reason for loss of settled home is family and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate, followed by private sector evictions and domestic abuse.
- 5.4 Full details of the evidence review are in **APPENDIX 2**.
- 5.5 There is no single factor behind the increased demand and complexity of need being seen within the sector. Various changes to national and local policies impact homelessness and this Strategy seeks to achieve a balance between addressing the presenting need of those experiencing homelessness and working upstream to prevent homelessness from occurring by influencing the systems and processes that impact a household's ability to sustain housing.

5.6 The six key priorities are listed below:

1) Upstream Prevention - Designing out Homelessness

a commitment to a whole system, integrated approach to designing out homelessness and addressing need at the earliest opportunity.

2) Empowerment - The Start of Coproduction

a commitment to listening to the voices of lived experience, recognising that homelessness cannot be fully understood without learning from those who have experienced it.

3) Rough Sleeper Pathway - Ending Rough Sleeping

a commitment to end rough sleeping by preventing it where possible and where it cannot be prevented by making it rare, brief and non-recurrent.

4) Robust Partnerships

a commitment to advocating for shared agendas with our partner agencies that addresses the root cause of homelessness and seeks to end rough sleeping.

5) Expanding Housing Options

a commitment to providing suitable and sustainable options for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

6) Sustainment

a commitment to breaking the cycle of homelessness by advocating for sustainable tenancies that enable households to access local services and integrate into local communities.

5.7 Full details of the key priorities, with objectives to achieve the priorities, are in **APPENDIX 1**.

5.8 The key priorities will be delivered and monitored through an action plan expanding on the objectives sets out within the Strategy, that will be monitored and evaluated by the Community Wellbeing Partnership.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

None

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, along with the associated Evidence Review has highlighted a number of challenges facing the sector that pose a risk of high demand and associated resource implications, including increased spend on emergency accommodation.

The Evidence Review demonstrates a number of structural challenges facing housing and homelessness that includes:

- complexity of need of those accessing services;
- provision of supported accommodation;
- existing supply of affordable homes;
- inaccessibility of private rented sector for low-income households;
- pressures on supply of temporary accommodation

The above, amongst other issues, has contributed towards unprecedented demand on Housing Options and associated increased spend on temporary accommodation as it becomes more challenging to find sustainable offers of accommodation to meet our statutory duties. The Strategy seeks to mitigate these risks by working with partner agencies to upstream prevention and expanding available housing options and support.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy recognises that homelessness has a wider reaching impact on individuals with protected characteristics. A priority within the Strategy focuses on providing equitable engagement with individuals from marginalised cohorts to improve access to services.

6.6 Health

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy recognises that health and housing are intertwined. The Strategy seeks to align homelessness as a priority within health strategies, recognising that homelessness is often the symptom of wider support needs.

In Stafford Borough, 43% of homeless applicants with support needs have presented with a history of mental health problems, which is above the national average. To prevent homelessness from occurring and provide sustainable offers of accommodation, we need to work with our health partners to respond to this increasing need. The priorities within the Strategy reflect the need to upstream prevention and develop robust partnerships with health stakeholders.

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030

Appendix 2: Evidence Review

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2025 and Allocation Policy Review - 19 January 2020

Contact Officer:	Hayley Smith
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Ward Interest:	NA
Report Track:	Cabinet 6 March 2025
Key Decision:	No

Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030

Introduction

Since the last Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, Housing Options has faced unprecedented demand for housing advice and assistance. This increase in demand has been coupled with increased complexity of cases, where housing is often the symptom of wider social, economic and health needs.

We know that Housing Options are not alone in facing additional demand on services. Our wider partners including health, drug and alcohol services and social care, amongst others, are also facing increasing pressures. These increased system pressures have resulted in housing and homelessness responses being synonymous with crisis-based interventions. We recognise that this cannot continue. To change this narrative, we must work with our partner agencies to look upstream at the systems and processes that impact homelessness.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy provides us with an opportunity to work with partner agencies to achieve this - seeking to prevent homelessness and where this is not possible to ensure that suitable housing and support is available that aids long-term recovery.

Local Context and Challenges

Stafford Borough Council is the local housing authority with the statutory function of providing housing advice and assistance and preventing and relieving homelessness. Housing Options is part of Wellbeing, comprising of Community Safety, Health, Housing Assistance and Leisure who work closely alongside stakeholders to deliver joint outcomes to improve health and housing for residents in Stafford Borough.

Since 2021/2022, the number of households approaching Housing Options for advice and support has increased by 120%, with those requiring emergency accommodation increasing by 130%, placing unprecedented demand on the service. However it has not just been increase in demand that has placed pressures on housing options but also increases in complexity of cases requiring intensive case management. In the last Strategy, 40% of cases presented with a support need - this has increased to 71% with a third of those cases presenting with three or more support needs (referred to as 'multiple and complex needs').

Complex support needs impact the causes of homelessness. Although the main causes of homelessness are recorded as 'being asked to leave by family and friends' and 'end of private rented sector tenancy' it is often the result of a number of inter-related support needs that have led to a tenancy coming to an end or a relationship breaking down. Further, domestic abuse remains a main cause of homelessness within the Borough - those experiencing domestic abuse are vulnerable and often have complex needs requiring enhanced support to resolve their housing need.

Households experiencing homelessness may fall between the gap of not meeting the criteria for mental health or other statutory support services but present needs that are too complex to sustain accommodation without support. Individuals and households within this cohort risk becoming homeless and housing options provides the safety net catching those who have fallen outside the criteria for wider services within the Borough.

Housing Options works closely with our wider health, social care and third sector partners to provide support and address the underlying causes of homelessness.

Households with unaddressed support needs find it difficult to access housing where eligibility criteria may exclude those who have a challenging housing history.

Nomination agreements with social housing providers gives Housing Options the best opportunity to support households facing homelessness into long-term housing. However, with increased demand and pressures on Housing Associations we know that our ability to discharge our homeless duty into the social housing sector will become increasingly challenging.

Since the last Strategy, increased rent and competing demand within the private rented sector has made this inaccessible. Households with vulnerabilities, who may have a low income or need additional support to maintain a secure tenancy, get overlooked for more financially stable households who present with little or no need, placing additional demand on homeless services.

Housing Options continues to work with housing providers and partner agencies to bridge this gap and provide options for those who would have previously fallen between services. We have continued to build on existing relationships with registered providers of social housing to strengthen our nomination agreements by sharing information and agreeing support plans enabling access to social housing. Housing Options regularly co-ordinate multi-disciplinary plans, where agencies with the ability to provide support are part of the housing process, sharing risk and responsibility for housing those with perceived complex needs and providing reassurance to housing providers who may otherwise have felt unsupported in the process.

Covid impacted the way we work with partners. Changes in working practices, alongside practical challenges such as the ability to arrange in person appointments can impact otherwise resilient partnerships. As partnership meetings have become virtual, the ability to build rapport with colleagues from different agencies has become more difficult, with frontline practitioners facing competing pressures. With multi-disciplinary meetings often taking place online, it can be more difficult to portray the challenges we have as a service.

Despite the above, we have significant support of our partner agencies for our work in ending rough sleeping. We have continued our joint working to provide 33-bed purpose built accommodation at Eagle House for those experiencing homelessness utilising homeless grants to provide additional support to meet the developing need. Although the new model has provided accommodation for single homeless with complex need there remains challenges with availability of move on accommodation

for the cohort and uncertainty of future funding that is currently dependant on top-up homeless prevention grant.

In 2022, Stafford Borough Council were successful in bidding for two rounds of rough sleeping funding resulting in five units of dispersed 'housing first' accommodation with support and six units of purpose-designed accommodation under one roof for entrenched rough sleepers, who had been repeatedly excluded from other provision. This funding has been pivotal in providing secure accommodation for those rough sleepers and ensuring appropriate support is in place.

Since opening, all units have been fully occupied with providers maintaining waiting lists for those requiring accommodation with support.

Whilst pressure on the sector and increasing demand has brought with it unprecedented challenges, we have maintained positive case outcomes that sit above the national average. Looking forward, we anticipate that this will be a challenge to maintain. Asylum dispersal and resettlement schemes risks placing further demand on a sector already facing existing pressures.

This Strategy seeks to build on that existing work and achieve a balance between addressing the presenting need of those experiencing homelessness and working upstream to prevent homelessness from occurring by influencing the systems and processes that impact a household's ability to sustain housing.

Upstream Prevention - Designing out homelessness

Upstream prevention is a commitment to a whole systems, integrated approach to designing out homelessness and addressing need at the earliest opportunity.

To prevent homelessness we must look at the wider systems, structures and environments that households, who are most likely to be at risk of homelessness, navigate before they reach housing crisis. We recognise that there is no single demographic that is most at risk of homelessness however what our evidence review has demonstrated is that those experiencing social and health inequalities are at increased risk. Homelessness is fundamentally an issue of inequality that will not be addressed until we tackle the structural issues that surround it.

In order to address the structural drivers of homelessness, we must understand the root causes which are often complex and interrelated. Recognising that health is intrinsically intertwined with housing and homelessness helps us to make sense of these interrelated factors - acknowledging that detriment to one can have an equally severe impact on the other as demonstrated by the complex support needs of those approaching Housing Options for advice and assistance.

Our evidence review has shown that 43% of homeless applicants presented with a history of mental health problems, whilst 22% presented with physical ill health or disability.

Over 70% of applicants approaching Housing Options have at least one support need, with over a third of those applicants presenting with multiple and complex needs (defined as having three or more support needs). For these cases, we

recognise that homelessness is often the symptom, not the cause and to secure suitable accommodation we need to address the wider support needs impacting the household. By doing this at the earliest possible opportunity, and with the support of our partner agencies, we can prevent homelessness from occurring by working together to put the right safety net in place for vulnerable and marginalised groups to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place.

However, resources for early intervention that enable Housing Options to address the root cause of homelessness are limited across all sectors. Wider pressures result in short-term or crisis-based interventions that generally lead to short-term or emergency interventions, rather than tackling systemic issues that can create long-lasting change.

Universal and Targeted Prevention

Whilst systemic change is the long-term goal for upstreaming prevention, it is important that we continue to build on existing workstreams for both universal and targeted prevention. Universal prevention allows for an equitable approach where services are targeted at those in most need.

Universal prevention is about keeping as many households as possible in the universal domain through early interventions. For example, by ensuring information and advice on housing and homelessness is readily available and accessible for all, including marginalised groups.

Since the last Strategy, Housing Options have co-located with other departments, organised drop in sessions with community groups and upskilled our voluntary and third sector partners in housing and homelessness. With this approach, we ensure that information and advice is consistent, accurate and delivered to those at risk at the earliest opportunity. For households facing homelessness, they can receive advice and guidance from those that they already have a working relationship with and trust the most. For professionals, it provides a network of homeless advice and assistance where colleagues can turn to each other for help and support.

With 30% of homeless applicants being in work, we recognise that our service needs to be accessible in different forms. Stafford Borough Housing Advice Self-Assessment tool is an advice portal on Stafford Boroughs website, where households can access immediate housing advice specific to their situation. Individuals using the Housing Advice Self-Assessment has increased from 102 in 2018/2019 to 902 in 2023/2024 demonstrating the demand for readily accessible, digital interventions.

For targeted prevention, analysing cross-sector data is key so we can target interventions for specific vulnerable groups who may be most at risk of homelessness. Through the Youth Homeless Partnership, data on care leavers who may be at risk of homelessness is shared through regular Steering Groups with housing options and housing providers to provide options and solutions to those at risk before they reach crisis. Similarly, for those experiencing domestic abuse, Housing Options work alongside Staffordshire Womens Aid to provide early intervention advice and assistance to women fleeing domestic abuse who may

otherwise be homeless and jointly fund a Resettlement Worker to support those experiencing domestic abuse to sustain long-term housing.

Whilst we look upstream to influence the systems and processes impacting homelessness, it is important that we continue to build on the existing universal and targeted prevention work that was achieved during the last Strategy.

Upstream Prevention - How we will achieve this:

- Accurate information and advice about housing options, available to everyone who may be at risk of homelessness, that is delivered in a range of ways including web-based information and through community interventions.
- Build on internal and external data analysis to understand and address the main causes of homelessness in the Borough that will improve our ability to tailor targeted interventions to prevent homelessness, i.e. understanding why family/ friends exclude and evaluate success of current mediation offer.
- Advocate for services that provide space for early universal intervention by integrating services where appropriate, for example current co-location with Children's Service;
- Make best use of data to project forthcoming trends in homelessness, including pressures on the housing market, asylum resettlement programme and children in care so we can best prepare for increases in demand on the service, including sourcing of appropriate emergency accommodation.
- Continue to advocate a systems-change approach for designing out homelessness and health inequalities amongst partner agencies where opportunities arise, for example, through the Drug and Alcohol Strategy, Community Wellbeing Partnership, Housing with Care Strategy, Corporate Parenting Panel, Youth Homeless Partnership and Adult Safeguarding Board.
- Explore options for sustaining grant funded service that prevent homelessness and work with partners to make best use of resources, including Discretionary Housing Payment.

Empowerment - The Start of Coproduction

Empowerment is a commitment to listening to the voices of lived experience, recognising that homelessness cannot be fully understood without learning from those who have experienced it.

Homelessness is not a process, but an individual experience that goes beyond completing an application form. To understand the drivers behind homelessness, the wider causes and systemic issues, we have to listen to those who are experiencing it and recognise that the way we treat households who need our support has a direct impact on the households ability and willingness to seek the support they need.

It is within our gift in Housing Options to create a safe environment where individuals feel empowered to break down barriers and take ownership of their housing and support needs.

To fully understand what we can do to reduce trauma, we must see through the eyes of those with lived experience and learn from what those who have experienced homelessness will share with us.

Using these skills, the Housing Options team will have the best opportunity to empower individuals accessing the service, improving positive outcomes and reducing the number of homeless applications closed for non-engagement.

Further, partner feedback through the Evidence Review suggests that homeless households may struggle to access mainstream services indicating that health inequalities exist amongst services with those experiencing homelessness, where discrimination, exclusion and the stigma associated with being homeless remains an issue.

To understand why individuals do not access services, or 'fail to engage', we must level up the power inequality that sits within systems and actively listen and learn from the voices of lived experience. We must be open to service reviews and provide platforms for those with who have experienced systems and structures to feedback what worked well, as well as what needs improving.

If, as a whole system, we do not act differently, we will see the same outcomes, that will continue the cycle of homelessness. We need to change the narrative that systemic issues cannot be changed and provide those who are experiencing services the power to make positive change.

How will we achieve this:

- Commitment to provide a flexible supportive face to face service for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- Commitment to exploring reasons why households do not approach housing options or disengage from services through the help of our internal and external partner agencies to reduce the proportion of applications that are ended for lost contact.
- Explore provision of targeted accessibility points for specific cohorts of excluded or marginalised households, i.e. specialist advice drop-in services for people with complex needs;
- Champion genuine coproduction with individuals with lived experience, both internally and through stakeholder engagement, Increasing opportunity for engagement and input from people with lived experience of homelessness in consultations, service design and delivery;
- Explore training and wellbeing opportunities for front-line practitioners in the sector, including vicarious trauma therapy, psychologically informed interviewing and trauma informed approaches and listening skills.

A poem by Mr J Ellement -
Resident at Stafford Mental Health Supported Accommodation.
April 2024

T is for Troubles and tribulations we had
 U is for the unity we now have
 R is for the reality we all now feel
 N is for never ever turning back
 I is for interesting new abilities
 N is for now is the time for us all
 G is for great, generous support we all get

P is for promising new outlook on life
 O is for the olive branch we been offered
 I is for all the ingenious ways
 N is for negotiating our future selves
 T is for the thanks that I truly have.



TURNING POINT
inspired by possibility



Rough Sleeper Pathway - Ending Rough Sleeping

The Rough Sleeper Pathway is a commitment to end rough sleeping by preventing it wherever possible and where it cannot be prevented making it rare, brief and non-recurring.

This means:

- Prevention - stop people from being forced to sleep out in the first place;
- Rare - reduce numbers to as close to zero as possible;
- Brief - if a person sleeps rough, the episode should be as short as possible;
- Non-recurring - No one should experience multiple episodes of rough sleeping.

Rough sleeping is the most severe and visible form of homelessness, often the manifestation of complex support needs that unless addressed, will impact on an individual's ability to access and sustain housing

Since the last Strategy, rough sleepers presenting with multiple and complex needs has increased by 20%, demonstrating the need for specialist services, tailored to meet the needs of rough sleepers.

It is well documented that housing alone cannot resolve homelessness. Intertwined and complex needs can be seen as the controlling factors impacting a household's ability to sustain accommodation. Whilst these factors remain unresolved, it can be difficult for people experiencing rough sleeping to see maintaining long-term housing as the priority, often resulting in challenges in both accessing and sustaining accommodation.

Since the last homeless strategy, tailored services such as Complex Care and ICON have been established within substance recovery services designed to meet the needs of those with co-occurring mental health and substance misuse needs, including rough sleepers. The use of Synthetic Cathinones (Monkey Dust) amongst rough sleepers in Stafford and the surrounding areas has made it increasingly difficult to obtain positive interventions.

Although rough sleeping figures in Stafford are relatively low, rough sleeping is the most complex and resource intensive element of the service. Since the pandemic, national rough sleeping figures have increased and Stafford Borough has not been exempt from this. Housing Options have continued to work with partner agencies, including the Vulnerabilities HUB and Community Safety Partnership, to end rough sleeping.

Grant funded opportunities has enabled Stafford Borough to develop services to address rough sleeper need, by developing projects aimed at addressing both the housing and support needs of entrenched rough sleepers.

Since 2022, Stafford Borough have developed 11 units of accommodation specifically for those experiencing rough sleeping. We have developed a six bed purpose designed building that provides off-the-street accommodation for rough sleepers with the most entrenched needs who have been excluded from other accommodation provision in the Borough. In addition, we have developed five units of dispersed one bedroom properties with wrap around support - providing a 'Housing First' model for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.

The pathway recognises that no single housing solution will meet the need of rough sleepers but instead requires a variety of options, tailored to meet the needs of those experiencing the most severe and complex form of homelessness.

Since opening, all rough sleeper accommodation provision has been full. Whilst housing supply provides its own challenges to move on, we recognise that there is a delicate balance for those with experience of rough sleeping who need to regain trust, build relationships and often start a process of addressing underlying traumas which means that move on within specific timeframes is not always an option.

To support access to accommodation, Stafford Borough Council has commissioned Rough Sleeper Outreach to provide assertive outreach in the community for those rough sleepers who are most hard to reach. It has been essential for Rough Sleeper

Outreach to have an off-the-street offer that meets the individuals wants and needs and is immediately available. Without this, meaningful engagement is difficult.

We have worked with existing accommodation providers, such as Eagle House, to provide additional resource that increases the level of support they are able to provide so they can house those with experience of rough sleeping and complex needs. Utilising grant funding, and with the support of agencies including substance misuse and mental health services, we have been able to utilise 12 bed spaces for those with experiencing of rough sleeping at Eagle House.

Funding for rough sleeper initiative and supported accommodation provides uncertainty for the above provision. Without this provision, we would see increasing in rough sleeping in Stafford.

How will we achieve this:

- Commitment to maintaining a flexible, proactive service that responds rapidly to the needs of rough sleepers;
- Explore options for continuing current grant funding services, including accommodation and support;
- Promote coproduction as a golden thread through the Rough Sleeper Pathway, promoting trauma informed and recovery focused responses from internal and external partners;
- Analyse data on rough sleepers in Stafford in order to upstream rough sleeper prevention;
- Review move on options for the rough sleeper pathway, including the use of personalised budgets;
- Build on existing rough sleeper partnerships through the Vulnerabilities HUB and ensure relevant cases are escalated via the Adult Safeguarding Board, where appropriate.
- Contribute to the developing Drug and Alcohol Strategy to ensure that Monkey Dust and services designed around rough sleepers remains a priority;
- Explore options for rough sleeper recovery with partner agencies, including access to meaningful activities, volunteering, employment and options for 'exiting the system.'

Robust partnerships

Robust partnerships is a commitment to advocating for shared agendas with our partner agencies that addresses the root causes of homelessness and seeks to end rough sleeping.

Homelessness is rarely a need that can be resolved in isolation of other social and economic factors. For us to reduce levels of repeat homelessness and prevent homelessness from happening in the first place, our partner agencies must share our agenda of addressing the root causes of homelessness and provide systemic changes that prevent homelessness and rough sleeping from occurring in the future.

Since the previous Strategy, our partnerships have developed - moving from operational delivery to strategic direction and influence. We have strong operational relationships that have the ability to flex systems on a case by case basis to get the best outcome for the individual household. However, this needs to develop further to sustainable systems change that does not rely on individual relationships but is built into systems and processes that provides an equitable cross-sector services for those experiencing homelessness.

Where systems flex have been achieved and proven successful, those with strategic oversight have the gift to champion these approaches and take steps within their own organisations, and their wider partnerships, to embed those changes. Recent examples in Stafford have shown that when partners work together to resolve complex issues it reduces wider cost pressures on public services. For example, Staffordshire Police have reported up to a 73% reduction in police call outs for repeat offenders when both housing and multi-agency support has been provided.

Upholding our partnerships, is the support of the third sector, voluntary faith and community groups who provide frontline support and advocacy to those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping.

Community groups who support our partnerships enable statutory agencies to navigate systems and processes in order to obtain the best outcome for the individual. Through developing our robust partnerships, our vision is to eliminate the requirement for agencies to navigate complex systems and processes for those experiencing homelessness and instead, a whole systems approach becomes the norm.

Robust partnerships provide unique opportunities for collaborative commissioning and aligning of resources. At an operational level, there are opportunities for colocation of staff between agencies that enable skills and knowledge to be shared within the workforce and in turn can improve staff wellbeing and retention. Developing these initiatives, can lead to aligning strategies and commissioning agendas, that not only shares resource but also shares risk and provides joint responsibility and opportunity for flexibility between partner agencies, including our housing providers.

How will we do this:

- Revitalise the Homeless Forum that links operational partnerships with strategic oversight, celebrating our partnerships and providing opportunities for reflective practice and future development.
- Develop existing operational partnerships to challenge barriers to resolving homelessness and recognise good practice within the partnership where risk and responsibility is shared and positive outcome are achieved.
- Utilise opportunities to collaborate local strategies where each stakeholders role in preventing and relieving homelessness is clearly recognised within local priorities and is central to commissioning agendas resulting in targeted interventions.
- Explore opportunities for joint commissioning in line with local strategies and partnership agendas, where funding allows.

Expanding Housing Options

Expanding Housing Options is a commitment to providing suitable and sustainable options for households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

We cannot resolve homelessness without safe, secure offers of housing that is suitable and meets the needs of those who call it home.

Wider pressures on the housing market has widened the net of those seeking affordable and secure housing options. Pressures on home ownership have saturated the private rented sector making it more difficult to access for those on lower incomes. Increased private sector demand, and corresponding increased cost of renting, has in turn placed increasing pressures on social housing and more households seek affordable and secure housing options.

Landlords across all sectors have the ability to 'choose' their tenants, with those perceived as low risk in terms of income or wider support needs being offered accommodation.

What we see, is a domino-effect on supported housing and other homelessness services, where those households being pushed aside by wider demand are relying on the safety net of homelessness services to respond to their housing needs. We have seen this locally with emergency accommodation placements increasing by 130% since 21/22.

Since 2014, completion of affordable homes has been in line with this target however we recognise the pipeline in the short-term is reduced. In July 2024, Government announced an overhaul of the planning system which has seen new mandatory housebuilding targets for councils. Stafford has a new target of 751 dwellings per year. This is a significant uplift on previous figures and will result in significantly more affordable housing being delivered.

The majority of applicants approaching Housing Options are single people. However, one bedroom properties amount to only 30% of available social housing stock in Stafford Borough.

We need to expand our options to look at other tenures and housing solutions that meet the needs of those approaching our service.

The private rented sector remains difficult to access with 'no-fault' evictions remaining one of the main causes of homelessness, both nationally and within Stafford Borough. The Private Renters Bills seeks to abolish Section 21 Notice and introduce a simpler tenancy structure. However, there are market pressures that continue to make it challenging for households facing homelessness to access the private rented sector. In many cases, the 'no fault' eviction is often a result of more complex needs, for example, affordability and poor mental health, and if these wider factors are not addressed households will struggle to sustain secure housing.

The disparity between Local Housing Allowance and market rents has increased from 19.6% in the previous Strategy, to 27.6% meaning that the sector is increasingly unaffordable for low income households. A RightMove snapshot completed in December 2024 showed that out of 128 properties available, only 3 were within Local Housing Allowance rates. Notwithstanding Local Housing Allowance challenges, there remains a stigma attached to households facing homelessness that makes the sector difficult to access.

70% of households approaching as homeless have at least one support need. Increases in single homeless approaches and complex support needs has brought with it increased demand for housing with support.

Supported accommodation is not a one size fits all approach but is based on different models depending on the life experience of the persons it is designed to support. Specialist provision designed around the needs of specific cohorts, such as young people, those recovering from poor mental health, or those recovering from substance misuse enables for tailored support to be provided in a housing environment that is safe and meets the needs of the individual.

Since the repurposing of Supporting People funding, supported accommodation providers have relied on supported exempt accommodation (SEA) to fund housing related supported. SEA does not cover activities that provide care and support, but housing-related supported only. This gap in funding has meant that providers can only offer low to medium levels of general tenancy-related support leaving a gap in specialist supported accommodation that addresses wider care and support needs relating to mental health, social care and offending behaviour amongst others. As a result, there is often an insurmountable barrier where those facing homelessness are required to be accessing recovery services or already taking steps to address their support needs before they are accepted onto accommodation waiting lists. Where, what is needed, is the accommodation setting to provide a safe and stable environment to aid recovery, similar to the principles that we know as 'Housing First.'

In practice, supported accommodation providers end up housing those whose needs cannot be met by their service alone, often because there are little to no alternative options. This disparity between housing related support and the individuals wider care and support needs results in costly crisis interventions, placing additional pressures on health, social care and the police. In some situations, this can result in the placement breaking down which continues the cycle of homelessness but with

Stafford Borough Council have made best use of various grant funded initiatives that provides a temporary solution to plug this gap but ultimately there remains a disconnect between the provision of support and the provision of housing. Housing Options work closely with Staffordshire County Council to align our strategies on housing with support which we envisage will be further embedded with the implementation of the Supported Accommodation Act.

Since the previous Strategy, Housing Options has been successful in drawing down ring-fenced grant funding to provide eleven units of specialist supported accommodation for entrenched rough sleepers including those who had been repeatedly excluded from local provision. There are waiting lists for this provision which is dependent on future grant funding to continue.

The funding of supported accommodation going forward remains a concern, particularly for those who have experienced rough sleeping. Those with experience of rough sleeping often carry with them past traumas and have care and support needs that require specialist, often 24/7 staffed, support. Chaotic lifestyles and past traumas can often make it difficult for individuals to voice their support needs, which assessed in isolation may not meet current eligibility criteria for statutory services however when considered holistically, their need for support is clear. Individuals who are not eligible for health or social care funded services are reliant on general housing provision which does not always meet their needs.

Specialist accommodation for other cohorts, including young people, remains a gap in Stafford Borough.

As with other specialist groups, accommodation pathways for young people should be designed to meet the needs of the individual. There is not a one size fits all approach. For some young people, including those who are care experienced, the provision of social housing provides the security and independence needed to start adulthood. For others, the provision of a social rented tenancy is overwhelming and can be difficult for the young person and the agencies who support them to manage as their first home.

For those who require a stepping stone, supported accommodation provides a critical transition into adulthood. Supported accommodation provides a safe space for individuals to overcome barriers they may face, for example due to past trauma, learning disabilities, behaviour difficulties or complex needs whilst also providing skills required to manage and maintain a tenancy and live independently. Pathways of suitable accommodation for young people provide us with an opportunity to prevent homelessness upstream.

Expanding Housing Options - How we will do this:

- Review provision of emergency accommodation in line with demand to reduce bed and breakfast expenditure;
- Consider options for purchasing and refurbishing accommodation for use as general needs and emergency accommodation in line with the emerging Housing Strategy.
- Work with stakeholders at Staffordshire County Council to align homelessness with housing with care and other relevant strategies for vulnerable groups, including young people, domestic abuse and multiple and complex needs;
- Work with all housing providers to improve move on options from supported accommodation;
- Work with internal and external stakeholders to review supported exempt accommodation in line the Supported Housing (Regulatory) Oversight Act 2023, pending regulations.
- Commitment to understanding the barriers facing the private rented sector and to work with landlords to provide innovative solutions to improve access.

Sustainment

Sustainment is a commitment to breaking the cycle of homelessness by advocating for sustainable tenancies that enables households to access local services and integrate into local communities.

Closely linked to upstream prevention, sustainment recognises the need to reduce the revolving door impact of repeat homelessness. In Stafford, 22% of applicants with support needs presented with a history of repeat homelessness whilst 18% of homeless applications had accessed the service on more than one occasion within the last twelve months.

Within Stafford Borough, Tenancy Sustainment Officers provide flexible floating support designed around the needs of the individual that enable vulnerable households to access and sustain tenancies. Since the previous strategy, demand for tenancy sustainment support has increased and grant funding has been utilised to employ a second officer.

The Tenancy Sustainment Officers provide a wide remit of practical support to households, such as setting up bills, arranging appointments, managing utilities and applying for grants for furniture and white goods however in most recent years the needs of those they are supporting have become more complex and have included health, social care, criminal justice and substance recovery, amongst others. Officers coordinate multi-agency support plans to engage statutory agencies and enable households to remain at home.

Tenancy Sustainment Case Study

'When I first met T and his dog Max he had spent six years on the streets. When I approached T he would run away from me and it took weeks of outreach to build trust and for T to feel comfortable around me.

Although T was offered accommodation when the Government launched its 'Everyone In' campaign at the start of the first lockdown in 2020, he was still using substances and felt that he couldn't live a normal life at that time. He preferred to stay rough sleeping until he could get on a script, especially as few places were also not willing to accept his dog Max.

T stayed on the streets and continued begging however his health issues were getting worse. T was registered with a local GP and started a methadone programme through STARS. He was encouraged to accept temporary accommodation through the 'Everyone In' campaign.

Bromford Housing Association had become aware of his case through the weekly Vulnerability HUB. The Housing Association invited T for an assessment and accepted him and his dog, Max. T received the keys to his flat in November 2021.

Since then, T has engaged with Tenancy Sustainment with support varying to meet his needs at the time. Tenancy Sustainment have helped T to open a bank account, get copies of ID, previous Landlord references, set up utility bills, attend health appointments, apply for grants and maximise income including applying for PIP.

A case like this was not going to be easy but when you see what it means to the person, it's worth all the effort to make a difference to someone's life. T's tenancy has just been reviewed and signed off by Bromford, he has now been accommodated by them for 3 years and will be spending another Christmas in his own home. T's is at the point of living independently, but we will always be here to provide support if he needs us'

Whilst the Tenancy Sustainment Officers provide vital work to ensure households remain in their own accommodation, not all residents will need this level of support. For many, the community provides a source of support, both in terms of signposting to relevant agencies where needed but also to provide a safe place and a listening ear.

"The secret to an increased engagement with the vulnerable and homeless is not lanyards and laptops, but more coffee and doughnuts." Will Morris, House of Bread Director

How we will do this:

- Commitment to funding tenancy sustainment support within Housing Options that supports vulnerable people in the community, who would otherwise not have access to support services;
- To work alongside external stakeholders to improve the network of support to help households sustain their tenancies.
- To continue liaising with voluntary and faith- based organisations to support integration in local communities.

Governance

The key priorities within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy will be delivered and monitored through an action plan expanding on the commitments set out in this strategy to prevent and relieve homelessness in the next five years.

This will be led by Housing Options, as part of Wellbeing and will require active engagement from partners, recognising that one agency alone cannot end homelessness. The Strategy will be progressed via the Homeless Forum, which will be monitored and evaluated by the Community Wellbeing Partnership.

Stafford Borough's Corporate Plan commits to supporting households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and quarterly performance reporting is providing for Cabinet and the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

Evidence Review



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1 Background and Context

Stafford Brough has two main towns, the County town of Stafford and a smaller market town of Stone. The Borough is resident to approximately 138,670 people, with over half the population living in Stafford Town.

Levels of home ownership in Stafford are 9% higher than across England, with 42,532 owner occupied properties. Social housing accounts for 14% of overall housing stock (compared to 17% across England) with 8,146 properties across the Borough and private rented properties account for 16% of overall housing stock (compared to 20% across England) with 9,336 properties across the Borough (Census 2021).

Stafford Borough has a significantly higher percentage of owner-occupied homes than across England (71% vs 62%). Levels of social (14%) and private rented properties (16%) are subsequently lower in Stafford than England (20% - private; 17% social rented).

Although a relatively affluent area it contains some neighbourhoods experiencing social and economic deprivation. (ONS; Exploring Local Income Deprivation) Employment rates in Stafford are 80.8%, which sits above the West Midlands (75%) and national average (75.7%) however is slightly below the Staffordshire average (84.4%) (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 23/24).

Homeless applications from working households has remained relatively high at approximately 30% since the last evidence review was completed in 2019.

Cost of living pressures have inevitably impacted households ability to sustain accommodation. In 23/24, Citizen's Advice have recorded presentations from 2,091 households with debt related issues, amounting to nearly £5 000,000 amount of debt.

Stafford has an ageing population, with the number of people aged 75 to 84 years increasing by 38.9% whilst the number of residents between 35 and 49 decreased by 11.6% from 2011 to 2021. The proportion of those aged 65 is expected to increase further by 21% by 2032.

Despite the ageing population, the self-reported health of the population is good with 83% of residents reporting good or very good health compared to 81.7% across England. Lower levels of bad or very bad health are also reported (4.5%) compared to England (5.3%) and Staffordshire (5.2%). However, health inequality is apparent with a lower life expectancy of over 6 years for those living in the most deprived areas. Within the borough, these are Common, Highfields and Weston Downs, Forebridge and Penkside (Census 2021)

Since 2022, households approaching Housing Options for advice and support has more than doubled. Historically, a number of programmes that prevented homelessness were rationalised as part of the process of refocussing public expenditure, and the impact of these changes continues to be seen through increasing numbers of homeless presentations.

Stafford Borough is not a stock holding authority. In 2006, Stafford Borough Council transferred housing stock to Stafford and Rural Homes (now Homes Plus). Since 2017, Stafford Borough Council has managed their waiting list internally, with nomination agreements to Homes Plus along with other registered providers of social housing with stock in the Borough. Nomination agreements mean that a percentage of properties will be made available to the Council to offer to applicants from the waiting list in accordance with the Allocation Policy. Homes Plus advertise these properties via My HomesPlus website and applicants bid for eligible properties, whereas other Housing Associations provide their properties for direct nomination from the Council.

Since 2014, completion of affordable homes has been in line with this target however we recognise the pipeline in the short-term is reduced. In July 2024, Government announced an overhaul of the planning system which has seen new mandatory housebuilding targets for councils. Stafford has a new target of 751 dwellings per year. This is a significant uplift on previous figures and will result in significantly more affordable housing being delivered.

Support needs of households accessing the service continue to be high with 71% of households presenting with at least one support need, that is often unaddressed and increasing numbers presenting with more than one support need. Households experiencing homelessness can fall between the gap of not meeting the criteria for adult social care or statutory support services but perceived as having needs that are too complex for existing accommodation provision, resulting in homeless services being the safety net catching households who have fallen outside of other services in the Borough.

As it remains difficult to accommodate households with unaddressed support needs in the social housing sector, households often have no choice but to turn to the private rented sector which can be inaccessible due to high rents and competitive demand for properties within the sector. Those households with vulnerabilities, who may have a low income or need additional support to maintain a secure tenancy, get overlooked for more financially stable households who present with little or no need.

Since the last review, we have been working with housing providers and partner agencies to bridge this gap and provide options for those who would have previously fallen between services. We have continued to build on existing relationships with registered providers of social housing to strengthen

our existing nomination agreements by sharing information and support plan relating to households who may have previously been considered as too complex for general needs housing. For such cases, we have promoted a multi-disciplinary approach, where agencies with the ability to provide support are part of the housing process, sharing risk and responsibility for housing those with perceived complex needs and providing reassurance to housing providers who may otherwise have felt unsupported in the process.

Covid impacted the way we work with partners. Changes in working practices, alongside system restructures and staff changes has meant that we have had to take a dynamic approach to partnerships and respond pragmatically to those changes at both an operational and strategic level.

Practical challenges such as the ability to arrange in person appointments for vulnerable clients can impact otherwise resilient partnerships. As partnership meetings have become virtual, the ability to build rapport with colleagues from different agencies has become more difficult, with pressures on frontline staff to attend more virtual meetings with no travel time or crucial networking time in between. With multi-disciplinary meetings often taking place online, it can be more difficult to portray the challenges we have as a service, whilst other practitioners can often be balancing conflicting demands at the same time.

Despite the above, we have significant support of our partner agencies for our work in ending rough sleeping. We have continued our joint working with Midland Heart to provide 33-bed purpose-built accommodation at Eagle House for those experiencing homelessness. Eagle House have seen increasing demand from applicants with multiple and complex needs that, since supporting people funding was repurposed, they have not had the ability to support. Ring-fenced grant funding has been utilised to enable Eagle House to provide more intensive support to high need residents, including those with experience of rough sleeping. The new model has been successful in providing accommodation for single homeless with complex need but there remains challenges with availability of move on accommodation for the cohort and uncertainty of future funding that is currently dependant on short-term grant funding.

In 2021, Stafford Borough Council were successful in bidding for two rounds of rough sleeping funding resulting in five units of dispersed 'housing first' accommodation with support and six units of purpose-designed accommodation under one roof for entrenched rough sleepers, who had been repeatedly excluded from other provision. This funding has been pivotal in providing secure accommodation for those rough sleepers in crisis and ensuring that they receive appropriate support.

Since opening, all units have been fully occupied with providers maintaining waiting lists for those requiring high level supported accommodation demonstrating that there remains a gap in provision for high level supported accommodation.

'Everybody In' demonstrated that it is not just the provision of accommodation that is needed to break the cycle of entrenched homelessness and rough sleeping but that multi-agency support to address the wider needs of those experiencing homelessness is essential for long-term sustainment.

As services across the sector face their own restrictions and challenges, we are finding it increasingly difficult to access support that is timely and meets the multifaceted needs of those experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. Policies relating to early prison release, migration and the private sector housing have added to the existing pressures within the system, compounded by uncertainty on the ability of Housing Associations to continue to develop in the near future.

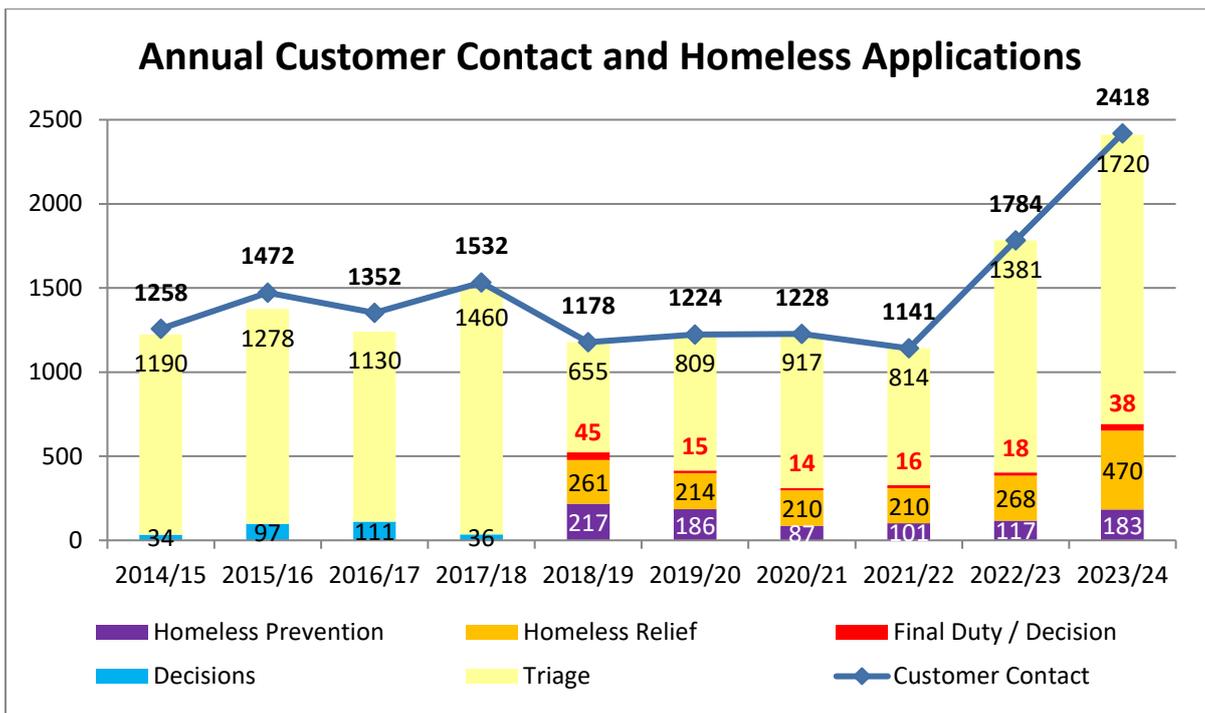
In order to end rough sleeping and prevent homelessness we must ensure sufficient supply of suitable affordable housing and work with our partner agencies so that adequate and timely support is provided that enables household to sustain long-term accommodation.

2 Households Accessing the Housing Options Service

The Housing Options Service provides general housing advice, free of charge to all members of the public. Households who are assessed as eligible for assistance and homeless or threatened with homelessness fall within our statutory function to take reasonable steps to prevent and/or relieve homelessness.

Case Type

Since 2021/2022, there has been a 112% increase in households approaching the service for housing advice and assistance, with a 120% increase in homeless applications during the same period which has placed considerable resource pressures on the Housing Options Team.



For those presenting as homeless, over 70% approach at crisis point (known as Homeless Relief) whilst less than 30% approach for early interventions (known as Homeless Prevention).

The Housing Options Team work closely with partner agencies to encourage early referrals into the service however it remains a challenge to encourage households to seek help at an earlier stage. As demonstrated later in the evidence review, households are more likely to engage with the Housing Options Officer and obtain successful outcomes when they approach at prevention stage.

Early interventions reduce wider pressures on the service, including emergency accommodation and pressures on staff who find themselves in a position of having to find immediate solutions to often complex and multi-faceted problems. Scope for creative interventions, that involve relevant partner agencies that best address the needs of the household, is best placed when households approach at the earliest opportunity. However, in some areas this requires a culture change for frontline practitioners who have become accustomed to working in crisis environments where policy and budget constraints provide an expectation that only those in crisis receive a response.

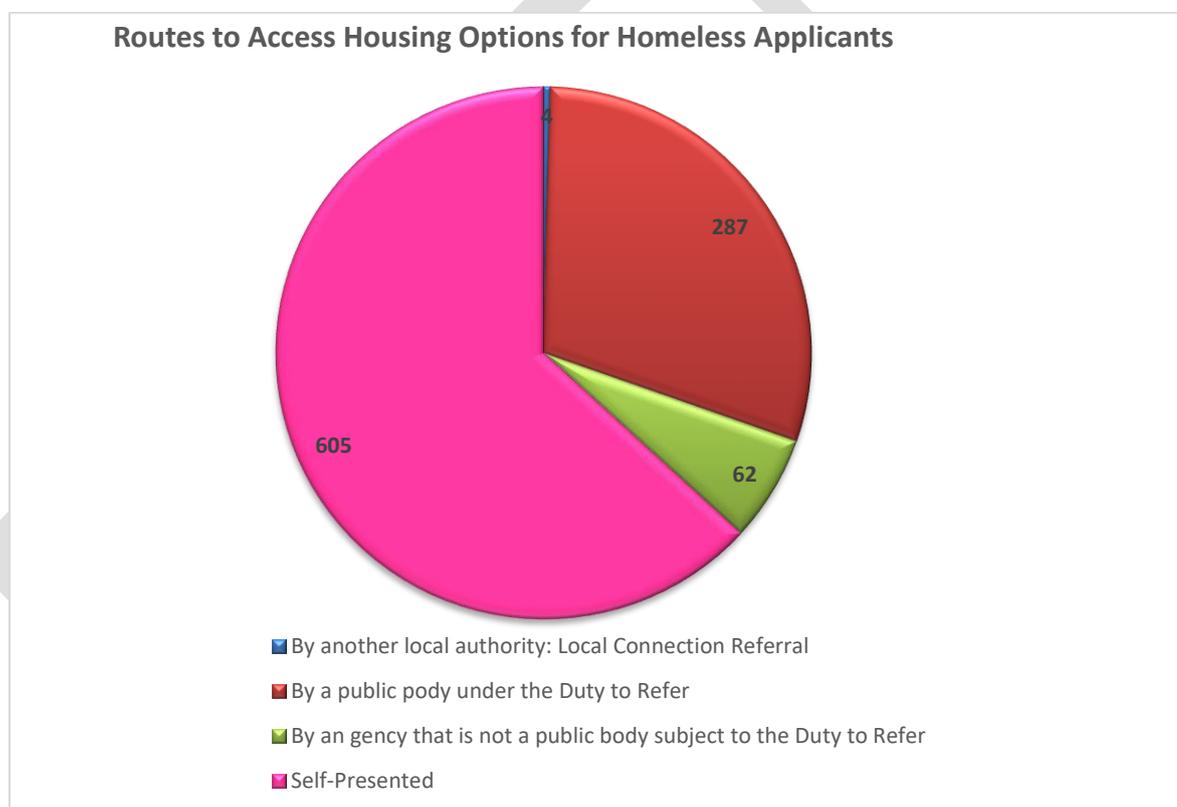
In Summer 22/23, caseloads reached over 100 per Officer which was unsustainable, resulting in unmanageable caseloads. Throughout 23/24, caseloads were reduced to an average of 37 per Officer, enabling more time for detailed case managed and positive interventions. However, this has only

been achieved due to additional staff resources through ring-fenced Homeless Prevention Funding.

Duty to Refer

The Duty to Refer places a duty to public bodies to refer households who may be homeless, or threatened with homelessness to their local housing authority. There is a discretion on other agencies to refer into the service and Stafford encourage those agencies to use this route to refer cases to the team at the earliest opportunity.

In 2023/2024, 353 referrals were received of which 121 were opened as homeless cases. 81% of referrals were received by a specified public body, with the remainder from agencies choosing to use this route to refer into the service.



Duty to Refers account for 16% of all homeless applications, which matches the national average. This has increased from 7% in 2018, showing that agencies use of Duty to Refer has increased since it was first introduced.

The top three referring agencies are:

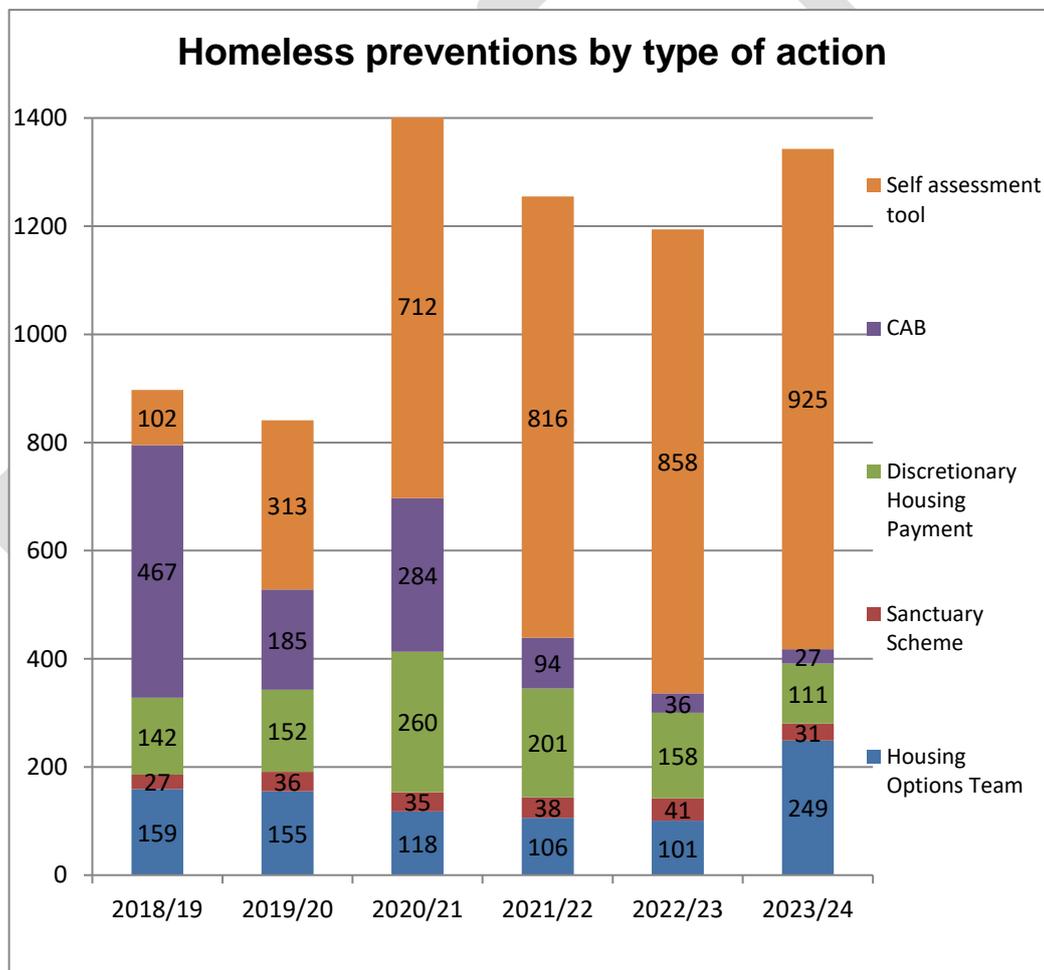
- Probation (43%)
- DWP - Job Centre (20%)
- Mental health services (15%)

Although we have seen an increase in referrals through the Duty to Refer, we would expect higher levels of multi-agency referrals due to the wider support need of applicants presenting as homeless. In addition, over half the Duty to Refers received, do not progress to a homeless application which indicates that the quality of the referral information provided, along with discussion with applicants about the referral, needs to be improved.

Homeless Prevention by Type of Action

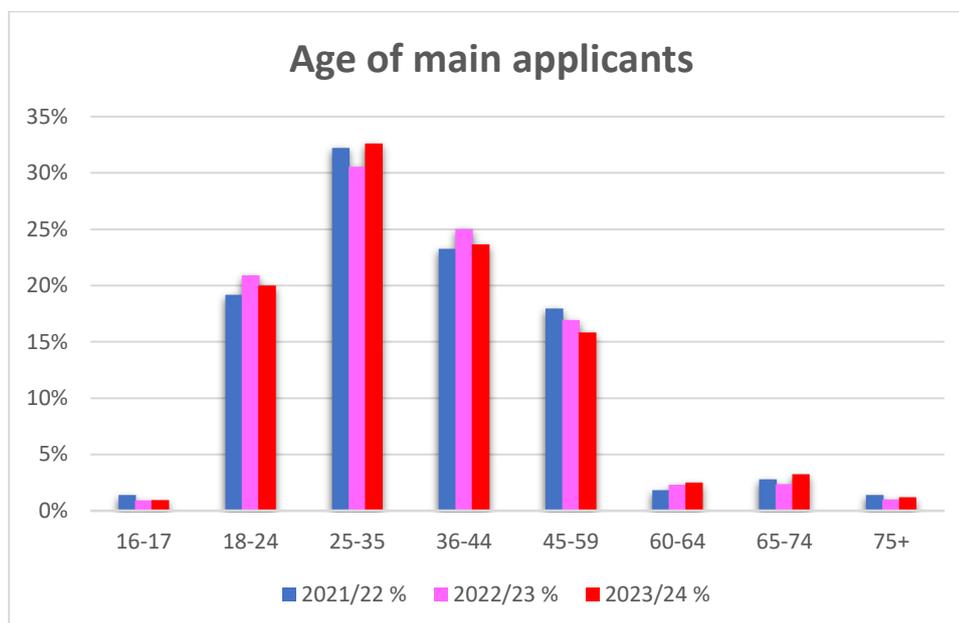
Homeless prevention needs to occur upstream and we recognise that there are other agencies, internal and external, that prevent households from being required to access homeless service by resolving issues at the earliest opportunity.

The table below demonstrates homeless prevention across various services in Stafford Borough.



Breakdown of Individuals approaching the Housing Options Service

In 23/24, 2418 customers contacted the service, with over half of those aged under 35.



Of those who approach the service for advice, 53% are male and 47% are female.

Despite Stafford Borough having an ageing population, there has been no notable increase in those aged over 65 approaching for homeless advice and assistance which indicates that older people have secure housing suitable for their needs, i.e. with the assistance of Disabled Facilities Grants, or their needs are being met elsewhere, i.e. through Adult Social Care and the provision of Sheltered Schemes.

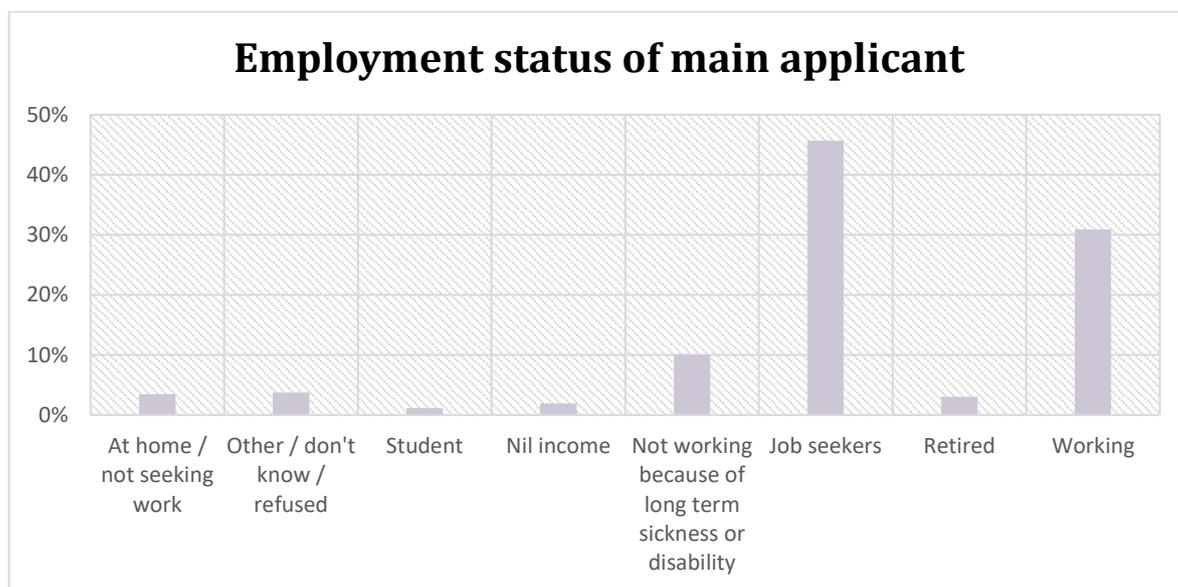
Sexual orientation of individuals approaching the housing options service, during the same period, is outlined below:

	Gay / Lesbian	Heterosexual	Other	Prefer not to say	Unknown
% of Applicants April 2023 – December 2023	1%	37%	1%	17%	45%

The largest ethnicity groups who approached Borough are:

- White: English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British (48%)
- Unknown (47%)
- Any other white background (1%)
- Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British: African (1%)
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (1%)

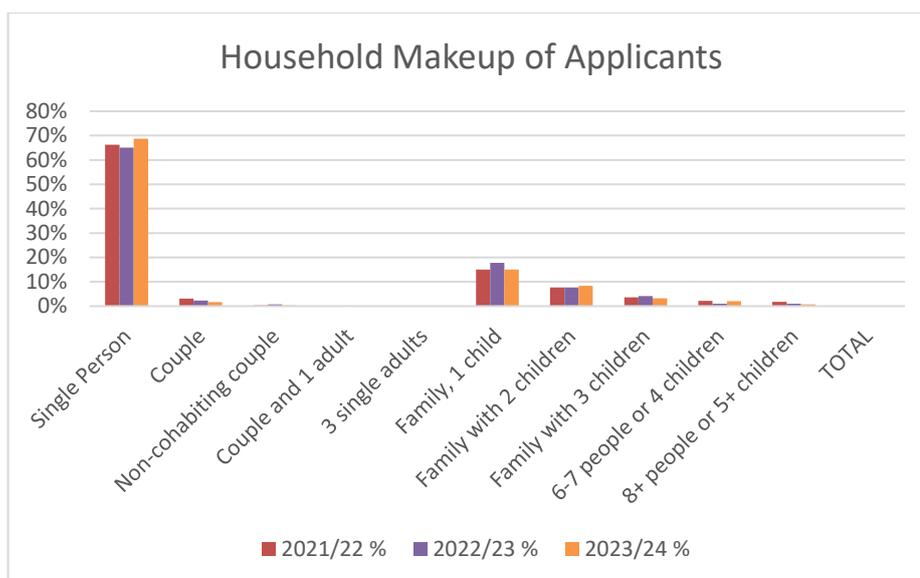
The employment status of individuals approaching our service is demonstrated by the graph below:



65% of homeless applicants were in receipt of an income- based benefit, whilst 31 % of individuals were employed at the time of approaching Housing Options.

Out of those on income related benefits, 35% were in receipt of Universal Credit, with households in receipt of legacy benefits receiving Managed Migration Notices during 23/24. We would anticipate that levels of those in receipt of Universal Credit will increase. There have not been any noticeable changes trends between those claiming Universal Credit and causes of homelessness.

The household make-up of those approaching as homeless as remained similar to the previous evidence review, with 69% of applications from single people.



Support Needs of Homeless Applicants

The table of data below compares the support needs of Stafford homeless applicants and homeless applicants across England during the same period.

In 23/24, 71% of households approached with at least one support need. Applicants. In 2018/2019, 49% of households in Stafford presented with at least one support need.

The table below shows the support needs from each applicant from Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK - Detailed local authority level tables: financial year 2023-24. One applicant may have more than one support need so will be included in multiple support needs. The data is subjective and based on an assessment of individual need completed by the Housing Options Officer in accordance with homeless legislation.

Support Need	Access to education, employment or training	Alcohol dependency needs	At risk of/has experienced abuse (non-domestic)	At risk of/has experienced domestic abuse	At risk of/has experienced sexual abuse/exploitation	Care leaver aged 18-20 years	Care leaver aged 21-24 years	Drug dependency needs	Former asylum seeker
Stafford % of Applicants	7%	8%	6%	17%	4%	3%	2%	12%	1%
England % of Applicants	4%	5%	3%	12%	2%	1%	0.5%	6%	3%

Support Need continued	History of rough sleeping	Learning disability	No support needs	Offending history	Old age	Physical ill health and disability	Served in HM forces	Young parent requiring support to manage independently	Young person aged 16-17 years	Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently	History of mental health problems	History of repeat homelessness
Stafford % of Applicants	17%	8%	27%	18%	1%	22%	1%	1%	1%	8%	43%	22%
England % of Applicants	6%	6%	46%	8%	2%	19%	1%	1%	1%	4%	26%	7%

Notably, 43% of applicants were assessed as having a history of mental health problems, compared to 26% across England. This was followed by history of repeat homelessness and physical health and disability as the main support needs of homeless applicants.

Applicants often present with more than one support need, with 32% recorded as having three or more support needs (considered as multiple and complex needs). In 2020/2021, 19% of applicants were assessed as presenting with multiple and complex needs.

The above demonstrates that we have not just seen an increase in numbers presenting as homeless but also an increase in complexity of need which makes it difficult to source suitable accommodation, particularly at a time where housing providers are under their own pressures. The role of partner agencies to help to address the relevant support needs and reduce the risks perceived by housing providers is critical.

3 Causes of Homelessness

In order to prevent homelessness we must address the underlying causes. The below includes data on a household's last settled address along with the main reason for loss of that accommodation.

In 23/24, the accommodation at time of application was:

- Living with family and friends (29%)
- No fixed abode (20%)
- Private rented sector (20%)

The reason for loss of last settled address was:

- Family/ Friends no longer being willing or able to accommodation (31%)
- End of Private Rented Tenancy (16%)
- Domestic Abuse (10%)

Since the previous evidence review, the above three remain the main causes of homelessness.

In each case, the Options Officer will try to prevent homelessness by securing existing accommodation and delve into reasons why applicants are being asked to leave.

In the private rented sector, the main reason that applicants are being asked to leave is due to landlords wishing to sell or re-let their properties which demonstrates the pressure on private landlords who no longer find it beneficial to remain in the market and aligns with announcements relating to the Private Renters Bill and abolishment of Section 21 Notices.

Repeat Homelessness

In 23/24, there were 61 individuals with multiple cases, accounting for 131 cases in total which equates to 18% of homeless cases during this period. Repeat homeless cases are individuals or households who have accessed our services on more than one occasion within the last year.

The main causes of repeat homelessness are:

- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate (16%)
- Eviction from supported housing (15%)
- Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (14%)
- End of private rented tenancy (14%)

4 Rough Sleeping

Rough Sleeper Evidence Based Estimate

Stafford Borough Council is committed to ending rough sleeping and since the last evidence review have developed a number of interventions and new partnerships to support entrenched rough sleepers into long-term accommodation, through ring-fenced government grant funding.

Cross-sector partnerships are key in delivering interventions to end rough sleeping and are embedding with Stafford Borough's Vulnerabilities HUB.

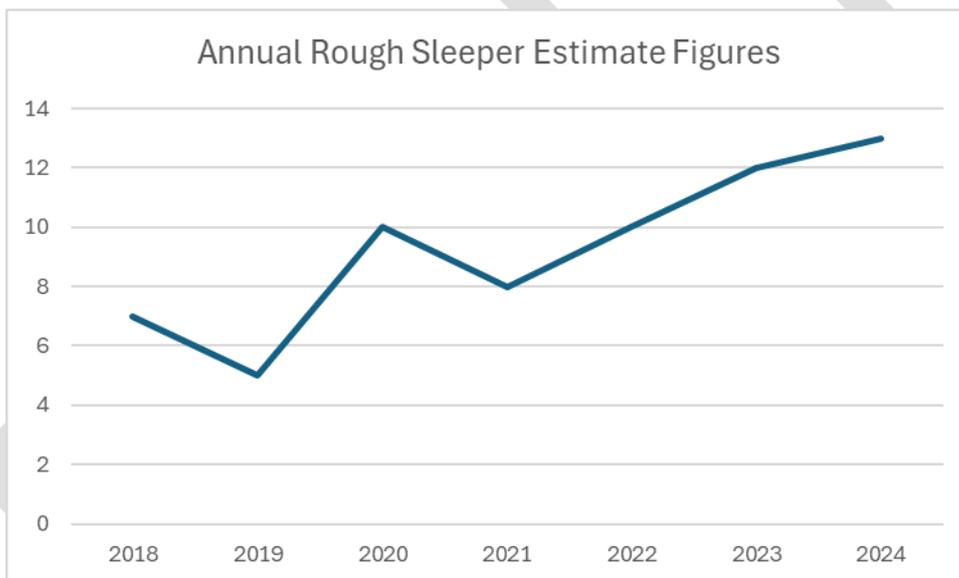
Each week, partner agencies share information on those who they believe to be rough sleeping and multi-agency action plans are agreed that are

coordinated by our grant funded Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker alongside the Housing Options Team.

The needs of those who are sleeping out are complex and multi-faceted and with limited supply of high needs supported accommodation it can be difficult to find suitable placements within Borough. 'Everyone in' demonstrated to us that providing a roof over someone's head provides the foundation for support but, in order to sustain that accommodation, support must be readily available and designed to meet the specific needs of the individual - recognising that individuals with a history of rough sleeping may have chaotic lifestyles and carry with them complex trauma.

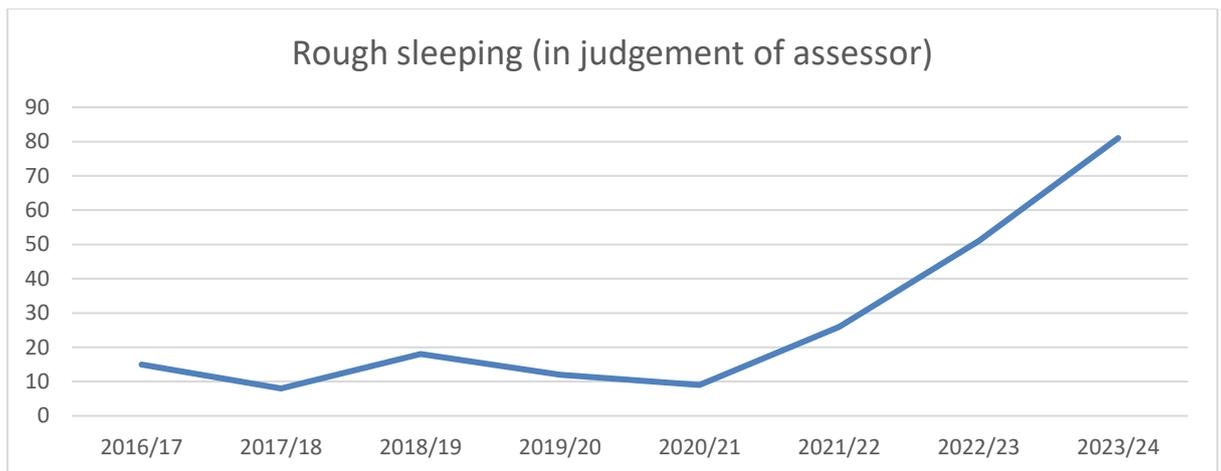
In this section, we will look at the numbers, demographics, support needs and root causes of rough sleepers in Stafford.

Since Covid 19, we have seen an increase in rough sleeping, which follows the national picture.



In 23/24, there were 81 homeless applicants whose accommodation at time of application was listed as rough sleeping, this includes 8 repeat cases.

The below graph demonstrates the increase in those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of application since 2020/2021.

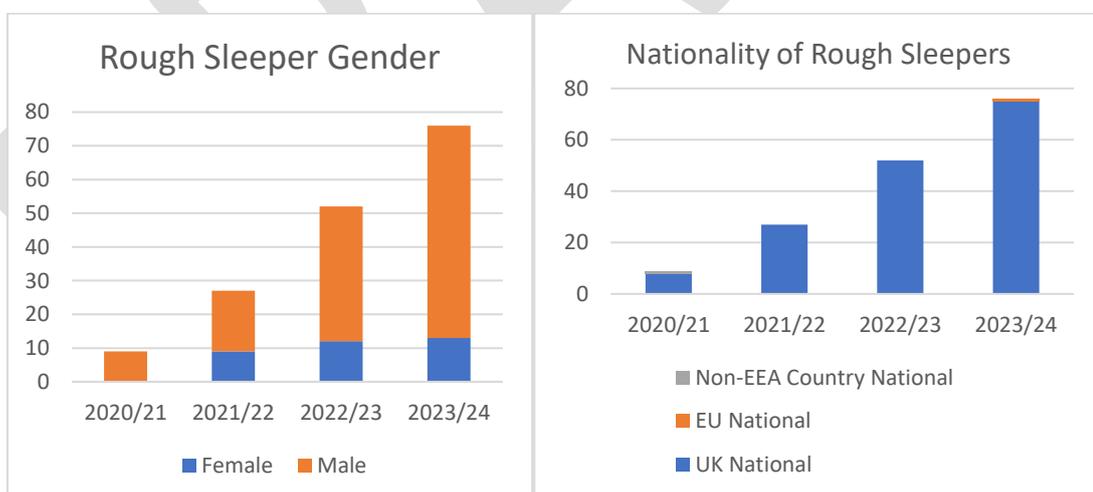


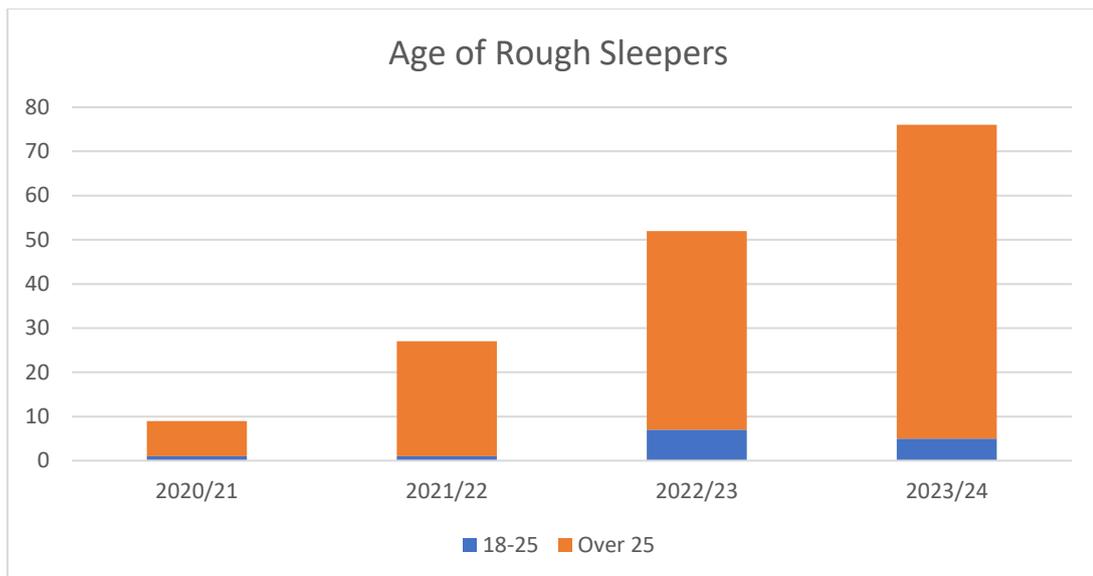
The main reasons for loss of settled home for rough sleepers are:

- Eviction from supported housing (29%)
- Relationship with partner ended (non-violent breakdown) (17%)
- Family no longer willing or able to accommodate (13%)
- End of private rented tenancy - assured shorthold tenancy (11%)

In addition to the above, 134 applicants (20% of all applicants) were recorded as having no fixed abode or sofa surfing with family or friends.

The below graphs demonstrate the demographics of those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of homeless application:



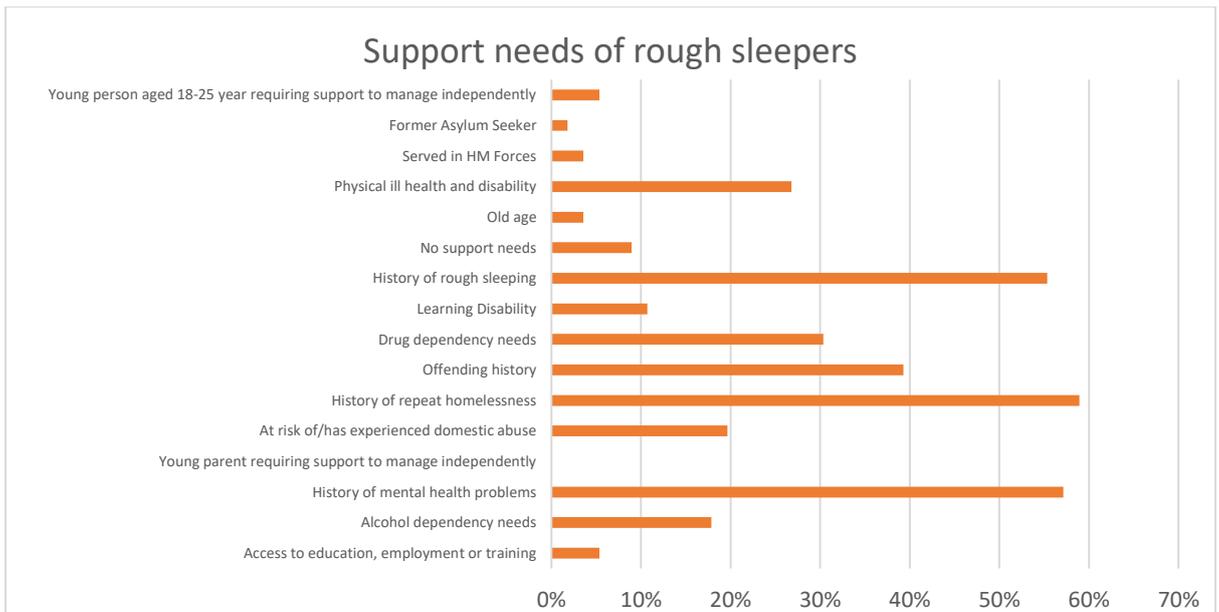


Support Needs of Rough Sleepers

The below data shows the support needs of homeless applicants who have been assessed as rough sleeping at the time of the application. Not all applicants would have been verified as rough sleeping by the outreach team and will not be entrenched rough sleepers. The support needs of entrenched rough sleepers (those reported each week as sleeping out) are more intensive than this client group, with all rough sleepers being reported as having multiple and complex needs.

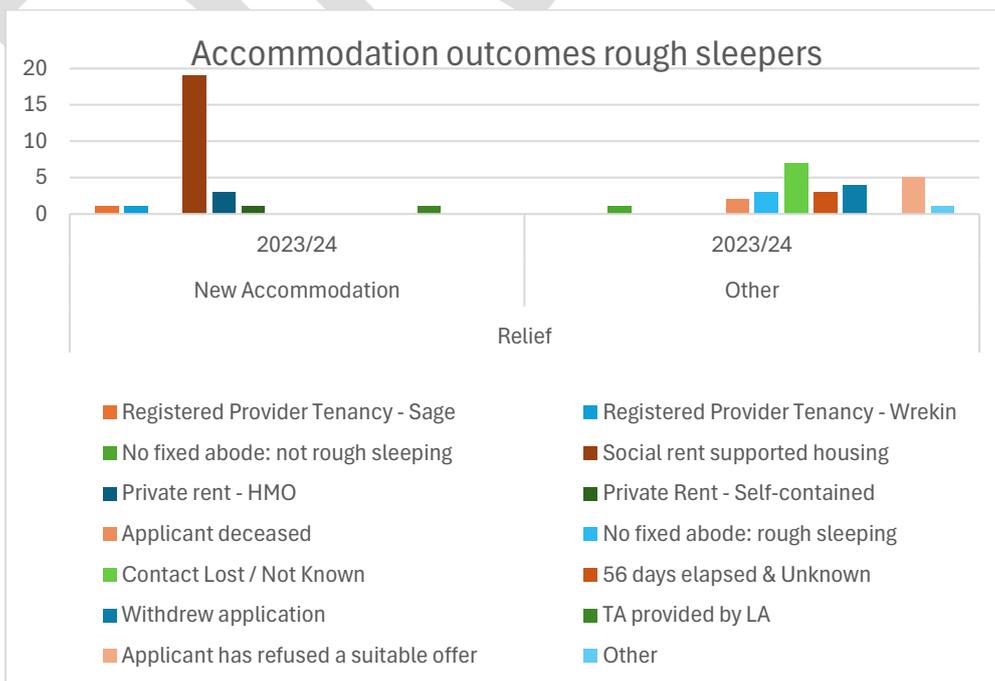
Over 90% of those assessed as rough sleeping at time of application, have at least 1 support need with 40% presenting with support needs relating to substance misuse and 57% presenting with a history of mental health problems. 38% of those with a history of mental health problems, also presented with support needs relating to substance misuse (co-occurring need). Out of the rough sleepers with support needs, 65% have 3 or more support needs (multiple and complex needs).

The below diagram shows the recorded support needs of those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of homeless application:



Of those assessed as rough sleeping at time of application, 14% were placed on the waiting list for social housing. Social housing is not always appropriate for those who would be rough sleeping as they often require immediate interventions, or may be disqualified from the housing register due to past tenancy history/ behaviours. This demonstrates that those who are experience rough sleeping do not access the most secure form of housing tenure.

The main housing outcome for those assessed as rough sleeping at the time of application is supported housing. However, this demonstrates the breakdown in the rough sleeper pathway, as this is also the main reason for loss of settled home for rough sleepers.



Of the rough sleeper cases opened during 23/24, only 3 were nominated for a Housing Association property. 1 was successful, 1 the applicant refused and 1 the HA refused. Three individuals were offered private sector accommodation.

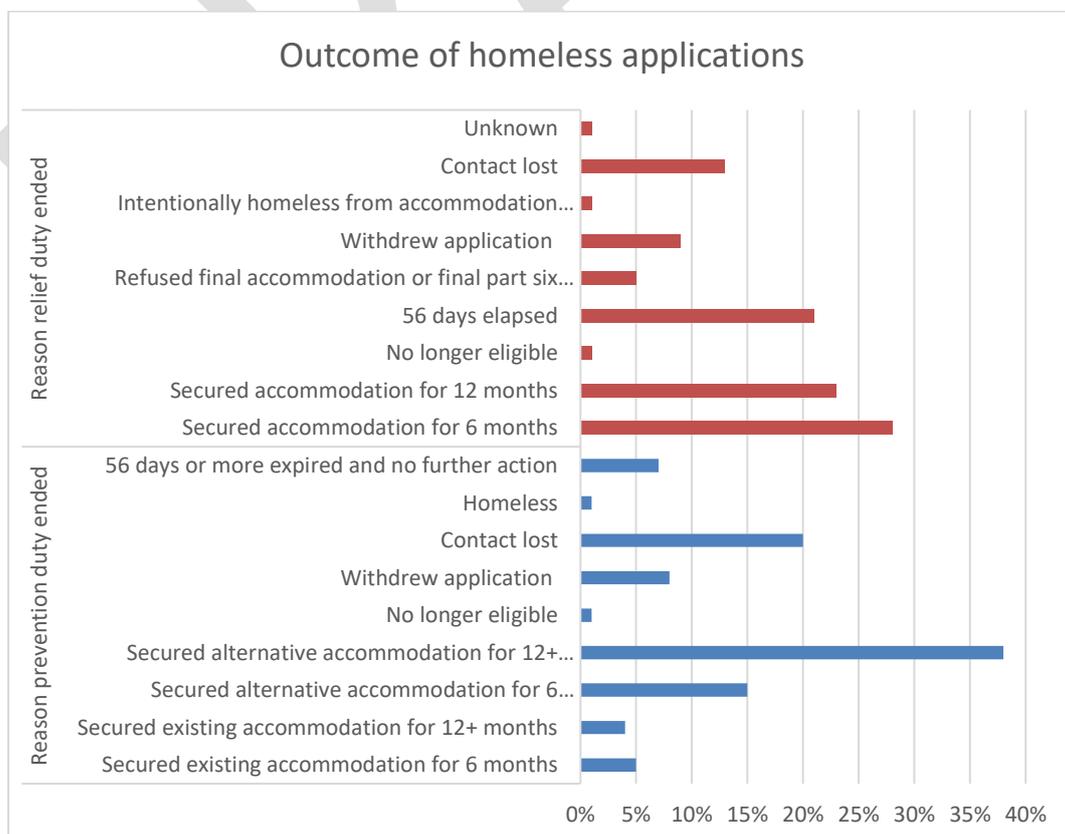
Of the rough sleeper cases opened during 23/24, 23 secured accommodation for 6 or 12 months. 18 were offered supported housing, whilst only 2 were offered a Housing Association tenancy. Three moved into private sector accommodation. 5 applicants refused a suitable offer and 6 lost contact with Housing Options.

For those verified as sleeping out and considered entrenched rough sleepers, the main accommodation outcome has been specialised rough sleeper accommodation which includes purpose designed accommodation and housing first style properties.

5 Outcome of Homeless Applications

In 23/24 there were 653 closed homeless cases, of which 171 were Prevention cases and 476 were Relief cases.

In 23/24, 62% of prevention cases and 51% of relief cases were closed with successful outcomes where the household had secure accommodation for minimum period of six months. Overall, 57% of homeless cases in Stafford are closed with positive outcomes, which is above the national average of 40%.



Whilst the majority of households receive positive housing outcomes, there are still high numbers of contact lost and application withdrawn, which are above the national average. This can be for a number of different reasons, including change of circumstances but demonstrates the challenges of engagement with those facing homelessness.

The graph also demonstrates the benefits of early intervention, as those who approach at Prevention are more likely to obtain a positive housing outcome for those who approach at Relief (crisis intervention). Nearly 40% of those who approach at Prevention are offered social housing whilst less than 10% secure their existing accommodation. Prevention work should focus on securing existing accommodation for households where it is safe and reasonable to do so which will reduce pressures on social housing. Housing Options are reliant upon social housing as an accommodation outcome, with very few moving into the private rented sector. Future projections of affordable housing delivery show that we cannot continue to rely on social housing as an accommodation outcome but need to expand housing options available to homeless households.

Lack of Engagement with Services

There has been an increasing trend of individuals who are difficult to engage and often do not want to work with the Housing Options Team. Lack of engagement can be for a variety of different reasons that relate to both support needs and previous experiences with public services.

Overall, 15% of homeless cases are closed due to lack of engagement with the service, with there being more likelihood of cases being closed for non-engagement at the relief stage as opposed to prevention.

We often find that services do not meet expectations as households develop their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the local housing authority or the availability of social or supported accommodation.

Ultimately, non-engagement remains a challenge for Housing Options who continue to explore creative and pragmatic ways to reach out to those least likely to engage, that includes working with the Rough Sleeper Outreach Worker and Tenancy Sustainment Officers. It is recognised that this approach requires Officers to have sufficient time and resource to work creatively to engage those who are most hard to reach and requires Officers to maintain low levels of casework to be able to achieve this.

The views of partner agencies and those with lived experience on challenges around engagement are included in the qualitative section of the evidence review.

6 Tenancy Sustainment

In recent years, the gap in services for homeless households has increased, particularly around the need for practical tenancy-related support. If we do not find a way to meet the gap in support provision, there would not only be an increase in pressure on Housing Options but there would also be a risk that we would not be able to source suitable accommodation for households that we owed a statutory duty.

In 2017, Stafford Borough Council utilised core funding for a Tenancy Sustainment Officer who assists vulnerable households who would otherwise fall through the gaps in services to access support and sustain accommodation. Demand on the Tenancy Sustainment Officer exceeded the capacity of one Officer, and we have used Homeless Prevention Grant for a second Officer. For many of our clients, the Tenancy Sustainment Officer is the only option of floating support in the community.

On average, each Tenancy Sustainment Officer hold a caseload of 13 clients which provides flexibility for assertive outreach and support that is trauma-informed and person-centred. There are no time frames on support, with casework designed around the needs of the individual.

Tenancy Sustainment Officers also support households to access grant funding for furniture and white goods, set up bills and direct debits, referrals and support in accessing statutory support services, assist with budgeting and income maximisation and hand-hold households who may otherwise not have been offered accommodation due to being perceived as too high need by housing providers. They also provide support to those in emergency accommodation to enable move on at the earliest opportunity and prepare households who have experienced homelessness for independent living.

The tenancy support workers advocate for individuals at risk of homelessness with statutory agencies recognising that they may not meet the eligibility criteria for services without assistance in portraying their needs.

Below is a case study highlighted the importance of Tenancy Sustainment:

'When I first met T and his dog Max he had spent six years on the streets. When I approached T he would run away from me and it took weeks of outreach to build trust and for T to feel comfortable around me.

Although T was offered accommodation when the Government launched its 'Everyone In' campaign at the start of the first lockdown in 2020, he was still using substances and felt that he couldn't live a normal life at that time. He preferred to stay rough sleeping until he could get on a script, especially as few places were also not willing to accept his dog Max.

T stayed on the streets and continued begging however his health issues were getting worse. T was registered with a local GP and started a methadone programme through STARS. He was encouraged to accept temporary accommodation through the 'Everyone In' campaign.

A local Housing Association had become aware of his case through the weekly Vulnerability HUB. The Housing Association invited T for an assessment and accepted him and his dog, Max. T received the keys to his flat in November 2021.

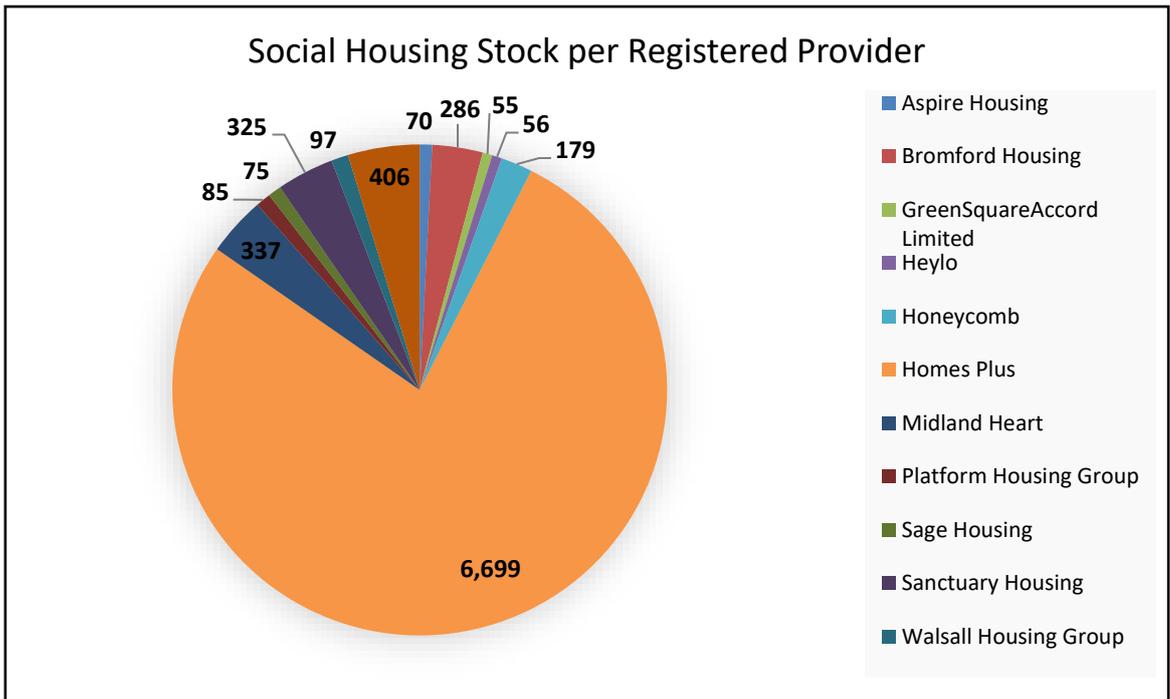
Since then, T has engaged with Tenancy Sustainment with support varying to meet his needs at the time. Tenancy Sustainment have helped T to open a bank account, get copies of ID, previous Landlord references, set up utility bills, attend health appointments, apply for grants and maximise income including applying for PIP.

A case like this was not going to be easy but when you see what it means to them, it's worth all the effort to make a difference to someone's life. T's tenancy has just been reviewed and signed off by Bromford, he has now been accommodated by them for 3 years and will be spending another Christmas in his own home. T's is at the point of living independently, but we will always be here to provide support if he needs us.'

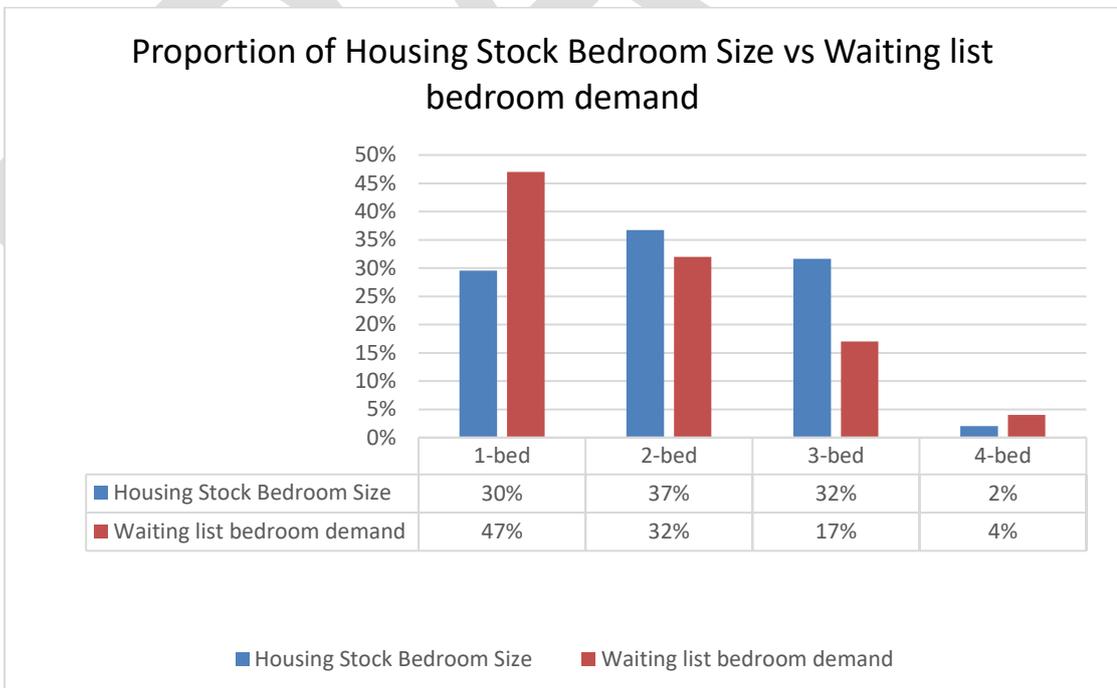
7 Supply of Affordable Homes

Social Housing Stock Numbers

There are approximately 8,800 recorded social housing properties across Stafford Borough (March 2023). Homes Plus is the largest housing provider owning 75% of social housing stock within Stafford Borough. A breakdown of all registered providers of social housing with stock in the Borough is below:



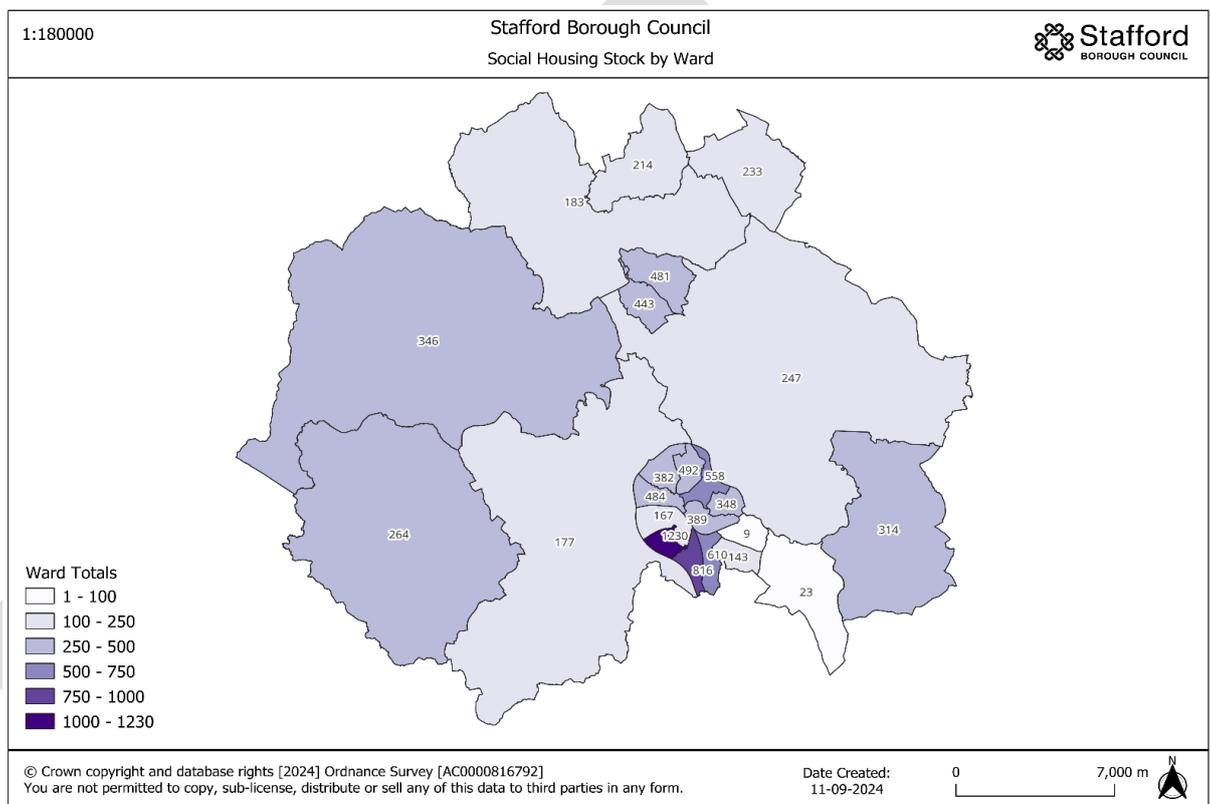
We have obtained bedroom size data for 90% of housing stock in the Borough. Below is a breakdown of bedroom type against waiting list demand that demonstrates the demand for one bedroom properties is higher than existing housing stock.



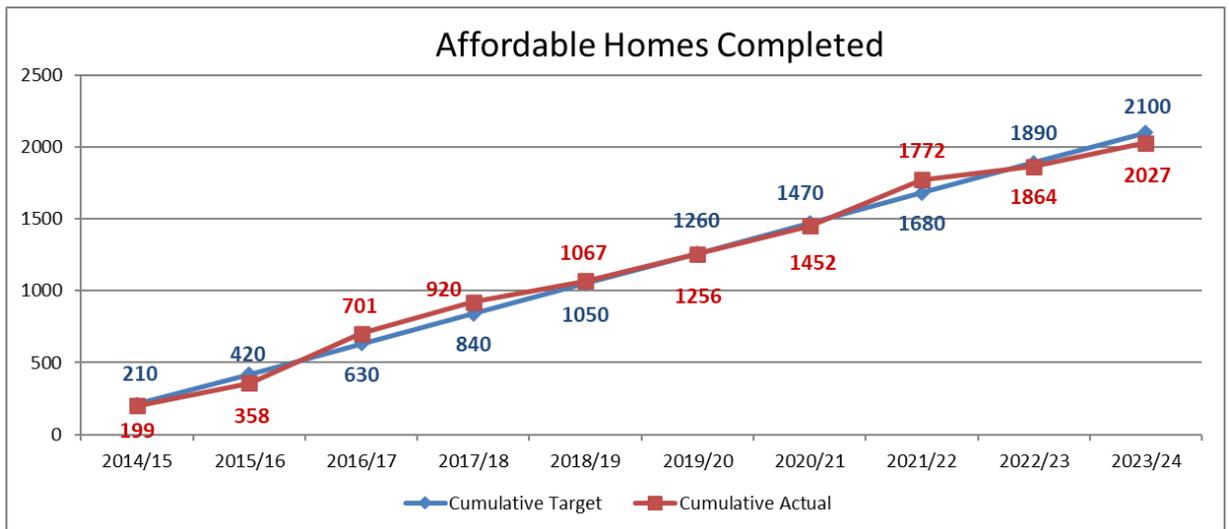
Stock broken down by bed size:

1-bed	2,269
2-bed	2,821
3-bed	2,429
4-bed	154
5-bed	3
Total	7,676
Unknown	903

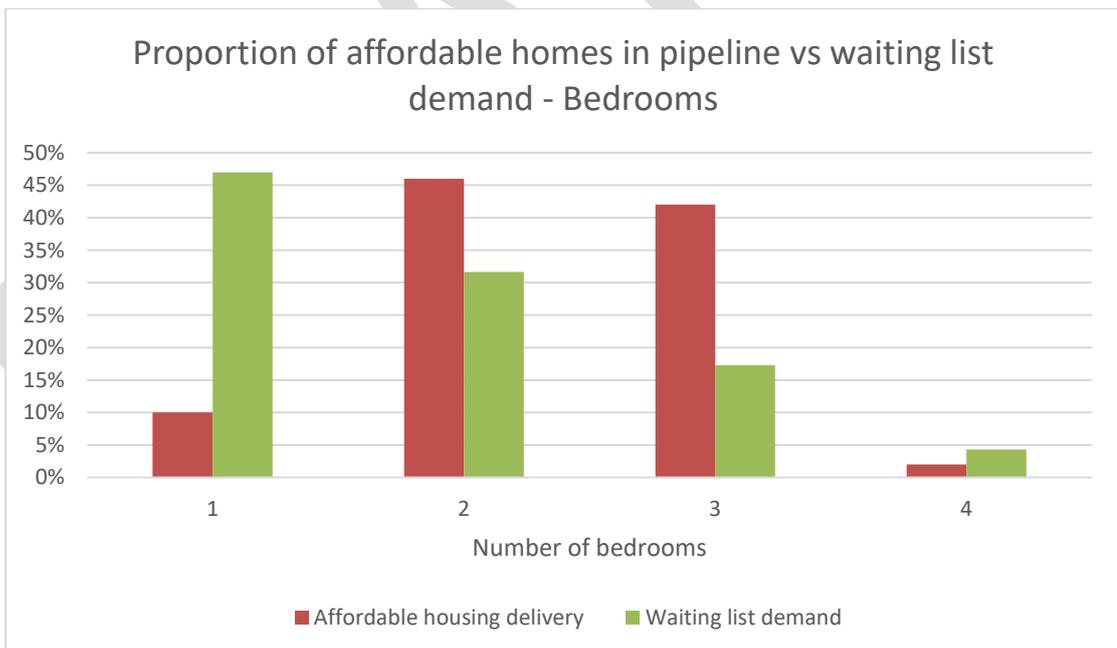
The current rough stock distribution across the borough can be seen on the map below:



Since 2014, completion of affordable homes has been in line with target however we recognise the pipeline in the short-term is reduced.



Data provided on bedroom type of future affordable home delivery demonstrates that property type being delivered does not always meet the demand for property type on our waiting list, especially for one bedroom property. The graph below outlines the disparity between percentage demand for property type on our waiting list and percentage property type proposed by future affordable housing delivery.



Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation is housing that provides housing related care, support or supervision to help vulnerable adults live independently, often known as exempt accommodation.

Stafford has a mixture of commissioned and non-commissioned providers. Models are based on intensive housing management with residents claiming

Housing Benefit to cover the cost of the accommodation and associated support. Residents are often expected to pay a service charge to cover ineligible costs.

Supported accommodation that requires additional funding from social or health services are not included in this Strategy. Stafford Borough Council is a two-tier authority with the upper tier, the County Council, having responsibility for adults with care and support needs under the Care Act and other relevant legislation. As a local housing authority, Stafford Borough Council is unable to access accommodation that requires additional funding from health and social care for care and support.

For households who approach the Borough Council as homeless with care and support needs, the two tiers must work together to find accommodation solutions - with the Borough being responsible for the bricks and mortar and the County being responsible for the support. This can be challenging when households do not meet eligibility criteria for social care or health provision, or, where they are Care Act eligible, there is differing professional opinion on the individual's ability to live independently.

Stafford Borough Council recognises that if we do not bridge this gap, we risk vulnerable people being either unable to access accommodation and rough sleeping; or losing accommodation and requiring repeat homeless assistance. Stafford Borough have utilised ring-fenced grant funding for homelessness to commission specialist provision for households experiencing homelessness that provide additional support beyond that which can be funded through intensive housing management. Grant funding is often short-term and risks uncertainty around future provision, meaning it can be difficult for providers to set up high quality, sustainable models. There is a requirement for the funding of supported accommodation to be reviewed, in line with the Supported Housing Act.

Previously, these models were funding through Supporting People.

In Stafford, there are seven main providers of supported accommodation that are accessible to the Housing Options Team: Eagle House; Rethink; League of Friends; Yellow Ribbon; Turning Point, Waythrough and Derventio Housing, with three out of six providers being commissioned to provide medium to high level support for those experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. In total there are 140 units of supported accommodation.

Where support needs exceed existing provision, we risk placements coming to an end and residents being evicted (often at short notice), and the system contributing to the cycle of repeat homelessness, non-engagement and increasingly complex support needs.

The table below outlines the number of units provided by each organisation and the level of support provided:

Name of Supported Housing provider	Number of Units	Level of Support
Eagle House	12 bedsits 21 flats	Medium to High Need
Rethink	5 self-contained flats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 1-bed 1 house <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-bed 	Low - Medium Need
League of Friends	55 units	Low - Medium Need
Derventio Housing	8 houses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 x 4-bed • 1 x 2-bed 	Low - Medium Need
Yellow Ribbon	2 x 4 bed houses	Low - Medium Need
Turning Point	6 units in purpose designed accommodation	High Need
Waythrough (previously Humankind)	5 dispersed self-contained flats	Medium to High Need

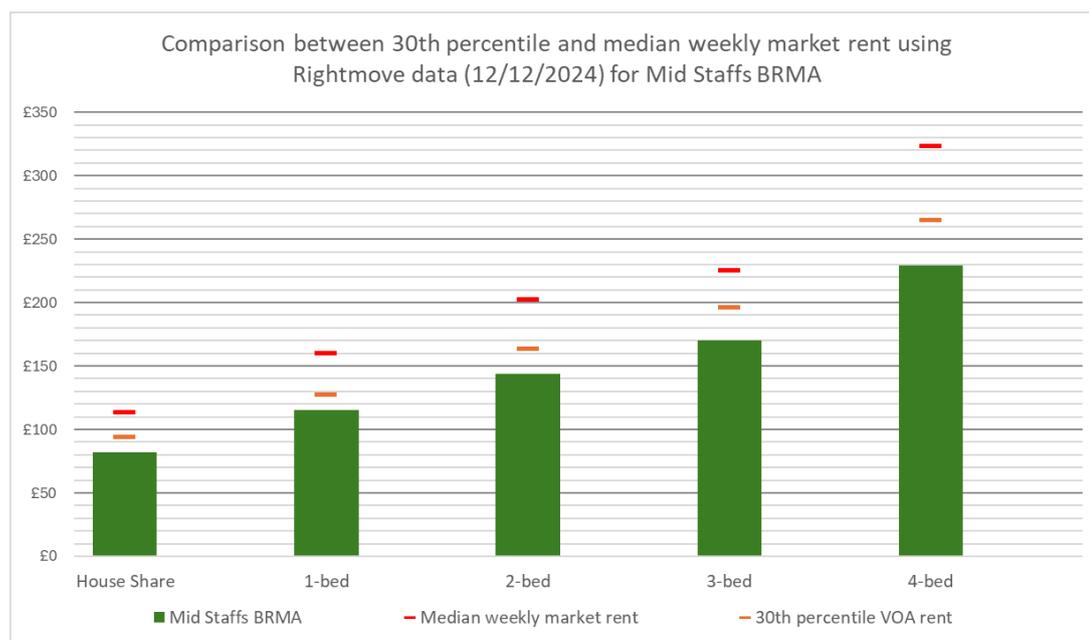
Private Rented Sector Local Housing Allowance Disparity

There are 9336 number of private sector units in Stafford Borough.

Household on low incomes rely on local housing allowance to support with rent payment in the private rented sector. Local Housing Allowance is capped depending on the size of the property. Whilst rents in the private rented sector have been increasing in recent years, local housing allowance has been frozen resulting in a disparity between the rents charged by private landlords and the amount of benefit low income households receive towards their housing cost. When rolled out in 2008, LHA was set at the median (or 50th percentile) rent cost as calculated by local valuation offices. In 2011, the reference point was reduced to 30th percentile and a national cap was introduced so that housing cost support could be restricted, irrespective of local rent costs. In 2012, the application of the lowest LHA rate, the shared room rate, was extended from under 25s to under 35s. LHA rate was frozen in 2020. During this period, the disparity between market rents and local housing allowance created a void that excluded low income households from access the market.

In April 2024, a four year freeze on Local Housing Allowance was ended and LHA was relinked to the 30th percentile for local rent costs for a single year. However, as demonstrated by the RightMove snapshot in the table below, the 30th percentile is not always reflective of the local market which fluctuates with local demand.

The average percentage disparity across all property types is 27.6%, compared to 19.6% in 2019. This demonstrates that despite the freeze on local housing allowance being uplifted in April 2024, the gap between market rents and local housing allowance has increased. A future freeze on Local Housing Allowance will increase the disparity between market rents, placing additional pressures on low income households and homeless services who are often reliant on private sector housing to fulfil their homeless duties where there is shortage in supply of social housing.



From a search on Rightmove 12/12/2024:

	Number of properties	Properties at/below LHA rate	Median weekly rent	Mid Staffs LHA	Percentage disparity
Room Share	20	0 - Cheapest is £92	£113	£81.80	£31.20 (28%)
1-bed	22	1 - £104 in Stone	£160	£115.07	£44.93 (28%)
2-bed	46	2 - £127 / £133 both in Stone	£202	£143.84	£58.16 (29%)
3-bed	20	0 - Cheapest £196	£225	£170.30	£54.70 (24%)
4-bed	20	0 - Cheapest £276	£323	£228.99	£94.01 (29%)
Total	128	3	-	-	-

The table shows that out of 128 properties on the market, only 3 would be accessible to households in receipt of welfare benefits.

Demand for private sector properties is high, with letting agents reporting waiting list for certain areas and property types, providing landlords with choice over tenants. Anecdotally, we have been told that Landlords often accept rent offers above those that are advertised due to high levels of competition in the market. Demand for private sector accommodation is a symptom of challenges faced by first-time buyers who struggle to access home-ownership in the current economic climate. Whilst home ownership remains only an aspiration for many middle to low income households, there will be disproportionate demand on the private rented sector which in turn pushes demand into social housing and housing advice services.

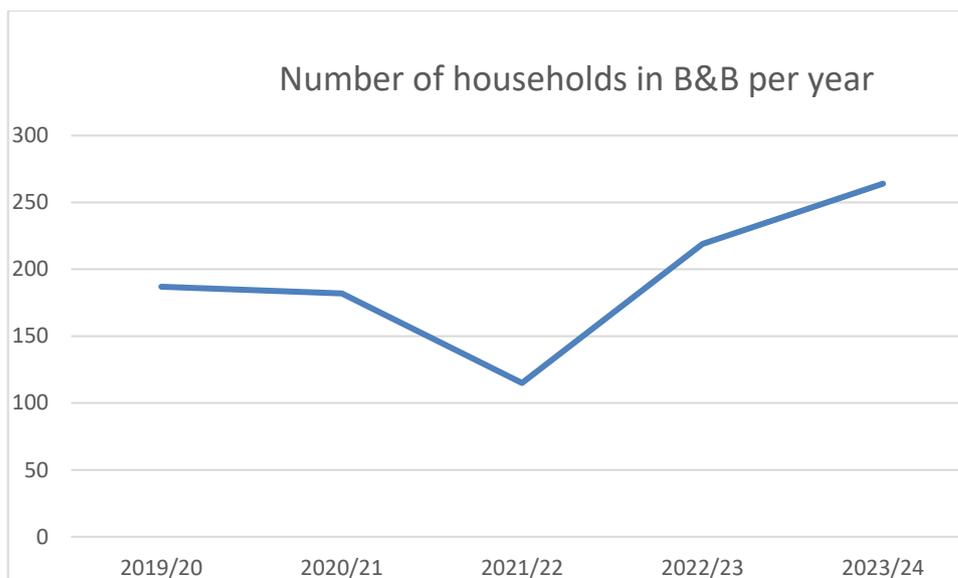
We know that one of the main causes of homelessness is 'no fault' evictions from private sector tenancies, with the main reason for Landlord's serving notice is due to the landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property. Research completed in 2022, shows that often Landlord's are required to sell due to their own finances, particularly if they live in more expensive areas far away from Stafford. Half of those Landlords interviewed as part of the research referenced the expectation that EPC ratings need to be improved to 'C' as part of their decision to sell their properties, particularly for those landlords with older properties.

Letting agents also raised concerns around the reduction in supply of private rented properties and all agreed that there had been an increase in demand for private sector properties. One letting agent mentioned that they are 'too scared to list a property' is as they know that as soon as it goes on, they will have 30 plus viewing applications within the first 24 hours.

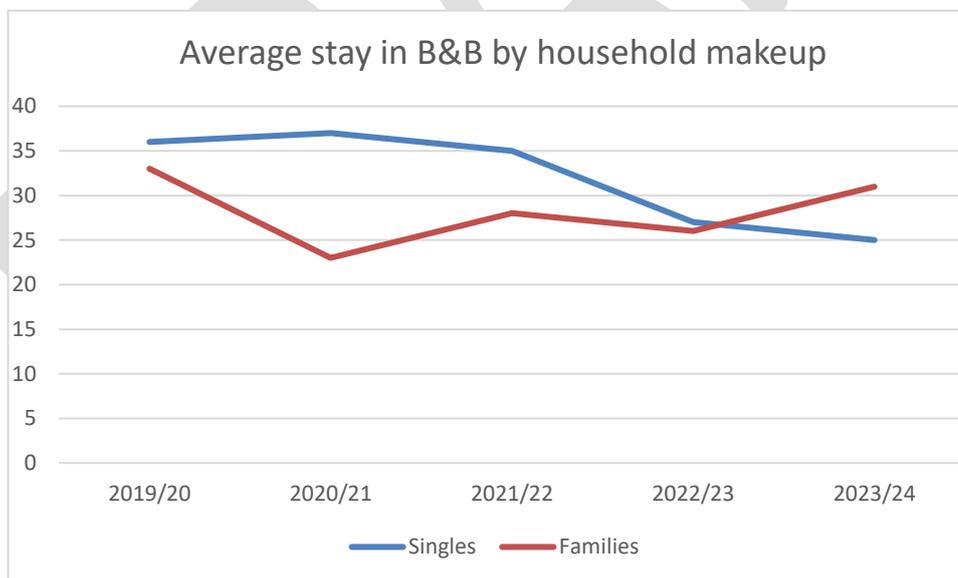
All letting agents confirmed that they had no issue in letting a property once a tenancy comes to an end. Rent prices are increasingly considerably and as demand is so high, landlords can easily 'pick' the household in the most favourable financial position.

8 Temporary Accommodation

Since 2021/2022, Stafford Borough has seen a 120% increase in homeless application. Increase in homeless approaches has been reflected in increase in use of emergency accommodation, including bed and breakfast which has seen a 130% increase over the same period. Relatively, there has been more of an increase in bed and breakfast accommodation compared to homeless application which is a reflection of the numbers of cases approaching the service at crisis point and the additional pressures on single person accommodation in the Borough.



Despite increased demand and wider pressures on the housing market, average nights spent by households in bed and breakfast has decreased for both families and single homeless. This is testament to the dedication of the Housing Options Team in working with housing providers to move people out of temporary accommodation at the earliest opportunity. In 23/24, time spent in temporary accommodation has increased for families which reflects delays in void periods when families are offered suitable accommodation.



Households spending more than four weeks in bed and breakfast has increased since the last evidence review. The data, read in conjunction with average nights in bed and breakfasts, indicates that there are more short-term placements, such as single night or weekend placements, which reflects the numbers of single homeless coming through the service who may require brief stays whilst nearest available accommodation is sourced.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
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Number in B&B > 4 weeks	9	24	42	63	32	52	57
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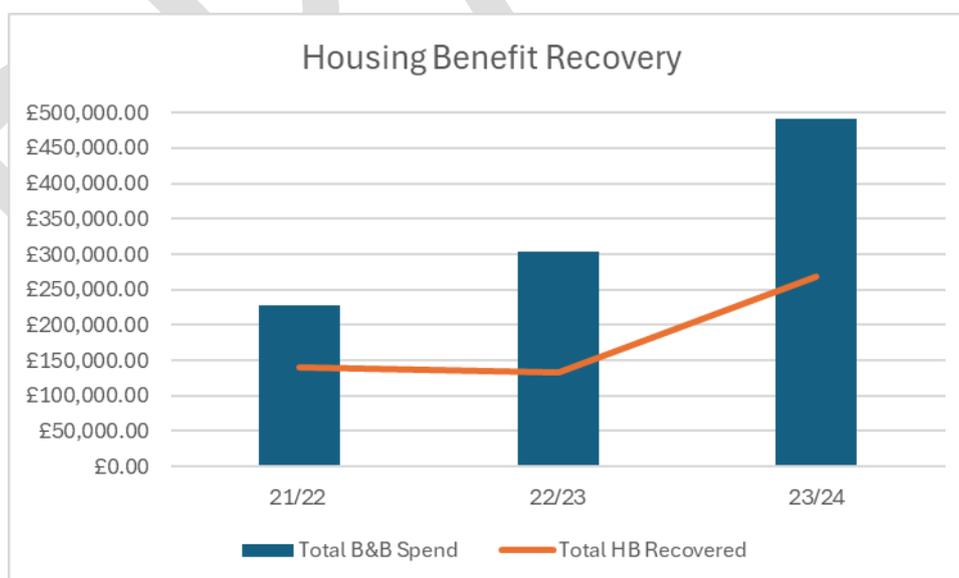
Time spent in bed and breakfast spiked in 2020/2021. Both for average time spent in bed and breakfast by single homeless households and the number of households staying in bed and breakfast for more than four weeks. This is direct impact of Covid-19 and 'Everybody In' where those who were roofless that night were offered emergency accommodation, regardless of priority need. 56% of 'Everybody In' placements resulted in move on to medium or long-term accommodation.

Estimated Cost of B&B placements

B&B accommodation can cost on average £80.00 per night per household.

Stafford Borough recovers Housing Benefit for those placed in emergency accommodation. Depending on the individual circumstances of the applicant this is not always possible, for example where applicants are unable to provide proof of income or stay for only one night.

Housing Benefit does not cover the full cost of the placement due to ineligible charges. Housing Benefit claims for Bed and Breakfast accommodation attract a nil subsidy which means there are wider costs to the Council, not demonstrated in the graph below.



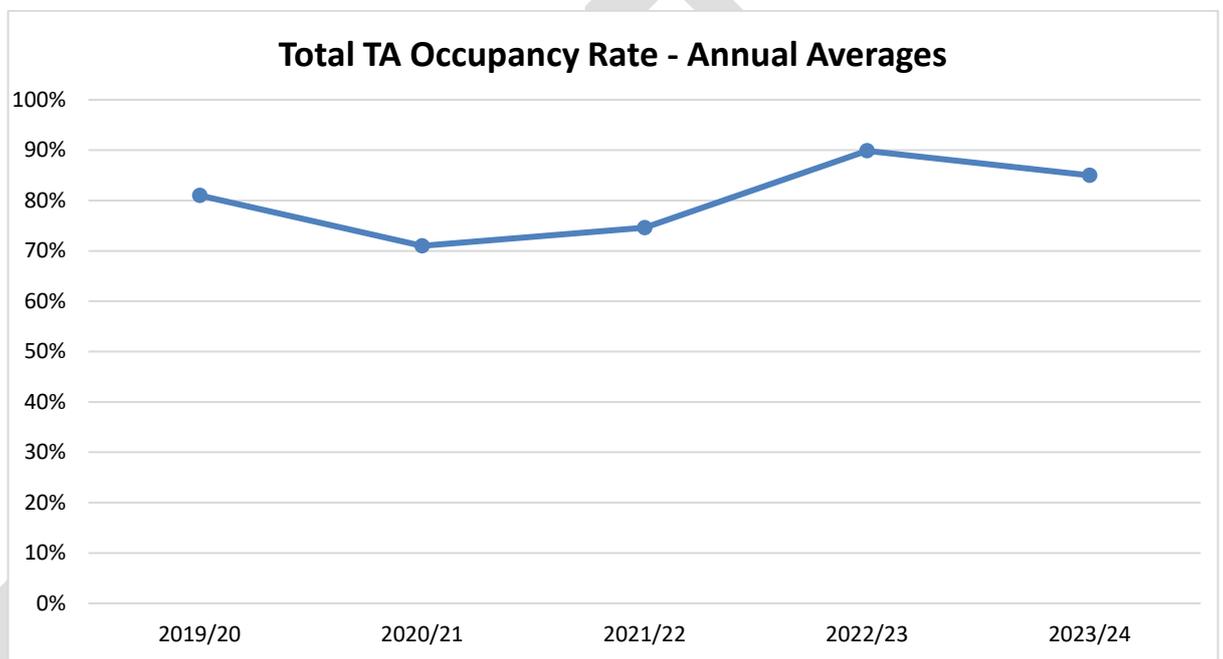
Nearly 50% of households who went into Bed and Breakfast moved onto a medium or long-term accommodation option, including registered provider tenancies, private sector and offers of supported accommodation placements.

26% placements ended due to being abandoned or outcome not known.

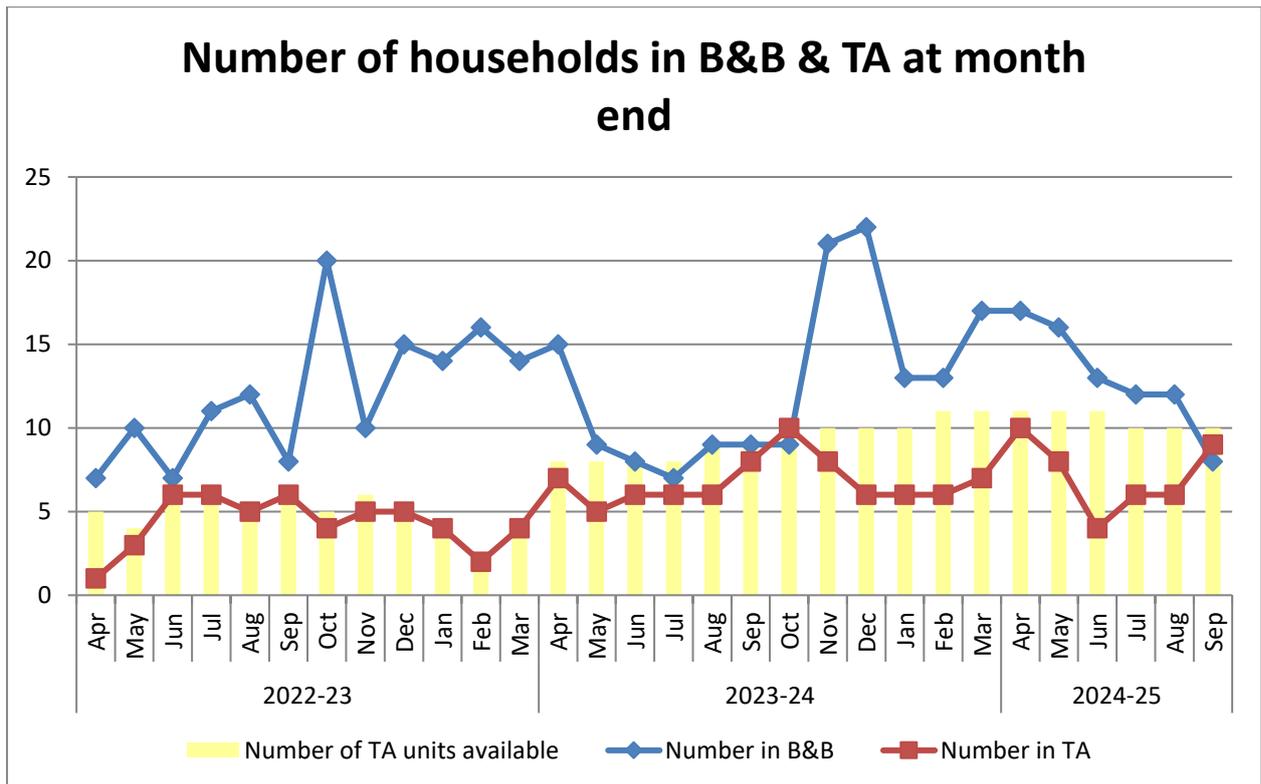
Temporary Accommodation Units

In November 2023, Housing Options requested permission to increase the number of leased temporary accommodation units from nine to fifteen by leasing an additional six units from Homes Plus. Since approval, five units have been leased with the final unit identified and due to be handed over this winter. During this period, a decision was made to hand back two existing leased units due to long-standing repair issues. To date, one replacement unit has been identified with the other in the pipeline of future voids.

In total, there are twelve leased units available for use, with an additional two units expected to be available this winter. The below graph demonstrates average occupancy of the temporary accommodation units since 2019/2020.

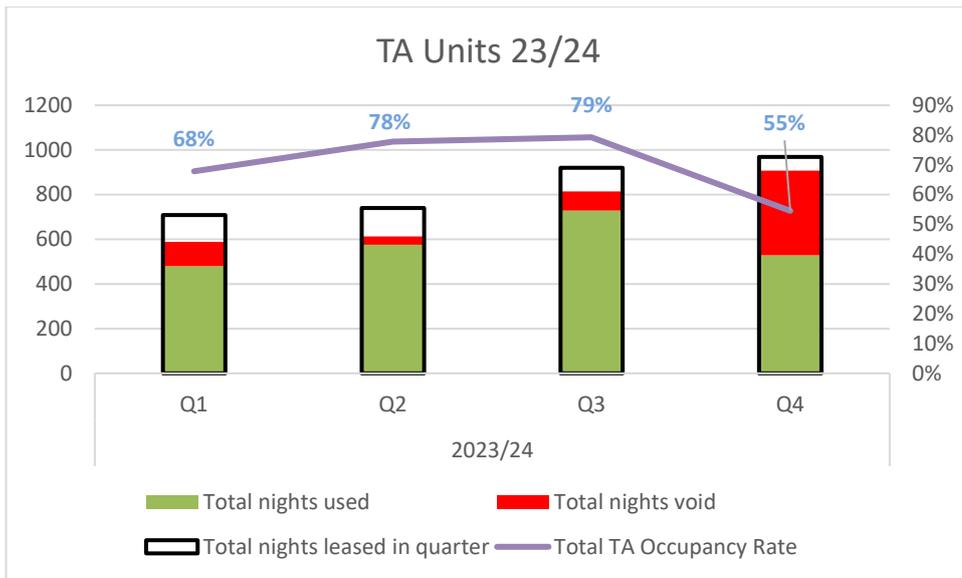


Leasing the additional units has resulted in a reduction in bed and breakfast placements as per the graph below.

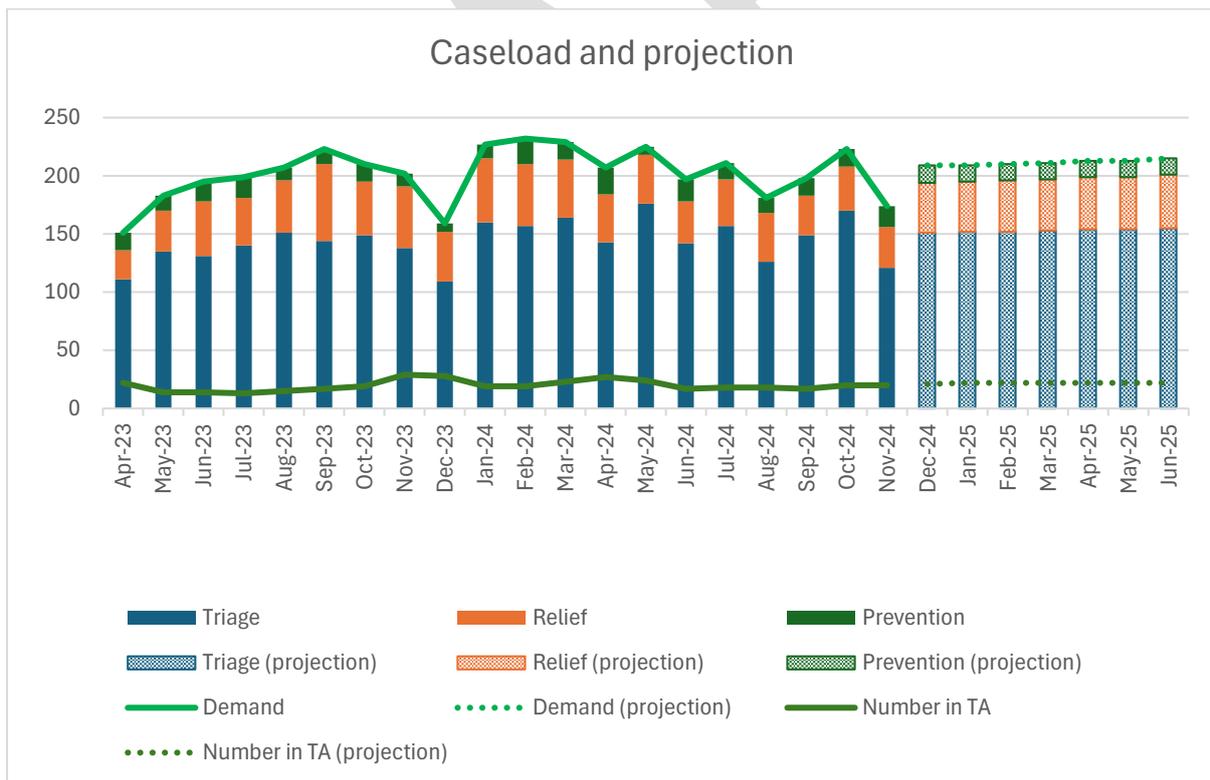


Leasing additional units has helped with B&B demand however with projected demand going forward there will be a requirement to increase number of leased units. Leasing additional units is resource intensive as the units are managed by the Housing Options Team. Additional staffing resource will be required if further units are leased.

The units are leased from Homes Plus who are responsible for void management. In 23/24, turnaround time for all voids increased which also had an impact on temporary accommodation. The below graph demonstrates the impact that void turnaround has had on occupancy rates for the leased units throughout 23/24, with void time amounting to 40% of available nights for in Quarter 4 of that year.



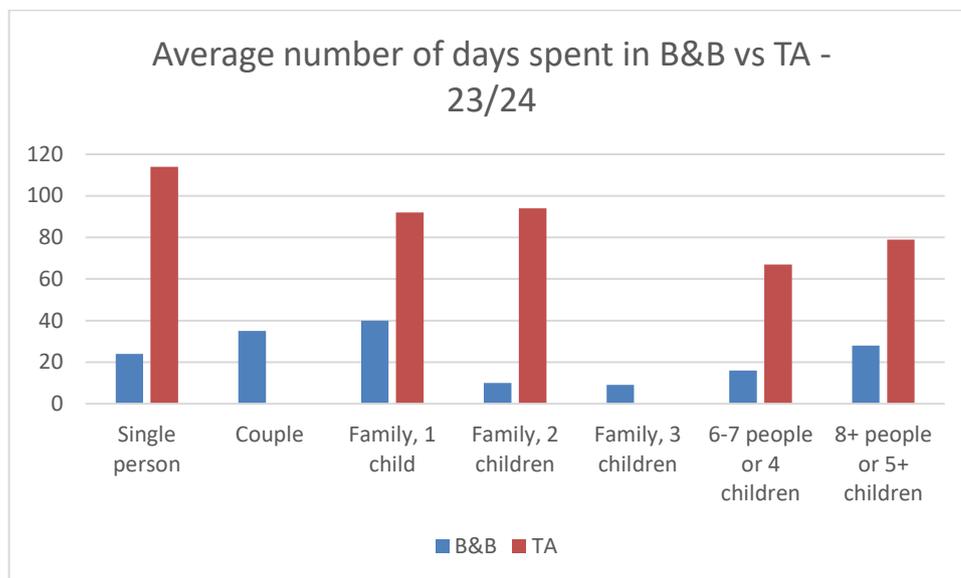
The below graph demonstrates the projected demand on emergency accommodation based on current case levels. Based on most recent data, it is projected that we would require 22 units of temporary accommodation to meet need.



Leased units provide more stability for households who are less likely to leave or abandon the placement. They also require more forward planning to move households into accommodation and are more likely to be occupied by families, as opposed to single homeless. In 23/24, 92% of households

placed in temporary accommodation exit with a long-term housing solution, with 80% being offered assured tenancies.

Average time spent in leased units is longer than in bed and breakfast which reflects the above narrative. Most of the household who occupy temporary accommodation units are families who are waiting on void works for social housing properties.



Section 9: Nominations and Waiting List

Since 2017, Stafford Borough Council has entered into nomination agreements with all registered providers with stock in the Borough and manage their own waiting list for social housing. Holistic housing needs assessments are completed by the Housing Options Officers who provide advice and assistance to resolve that individual’s housing need that goes beyond registering for social housing. In most cases, this is progressed to a homeless application.

Homes Plus, who own 75% of the social housing stock in the Borough, have 3561 households on their waiting list. Homes Plus operate an open waiting list.

Stafford Borough Council have 150 people on the waiting list.

74% of applicants on Stafford Borough Council’s waiting list have a high or urgent housing need, compared to 11% on Homes Plus waiting list. Over 60% of applicants with Homes Plus are in Band D, assessed as no need to move.

Demand for property type has not changed since the previous evidence review was completed.

		1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	TOTAL
Stafford Borough Council	No. on waiting list	68	52	21	7	150
	% of people on waiting list	45%	35%	14%	1%	100%
Homes Plus	No. on waiting list	1921	1000	475	165	3561
	% of people on waiting list	54%	28%	13%	5%	100%

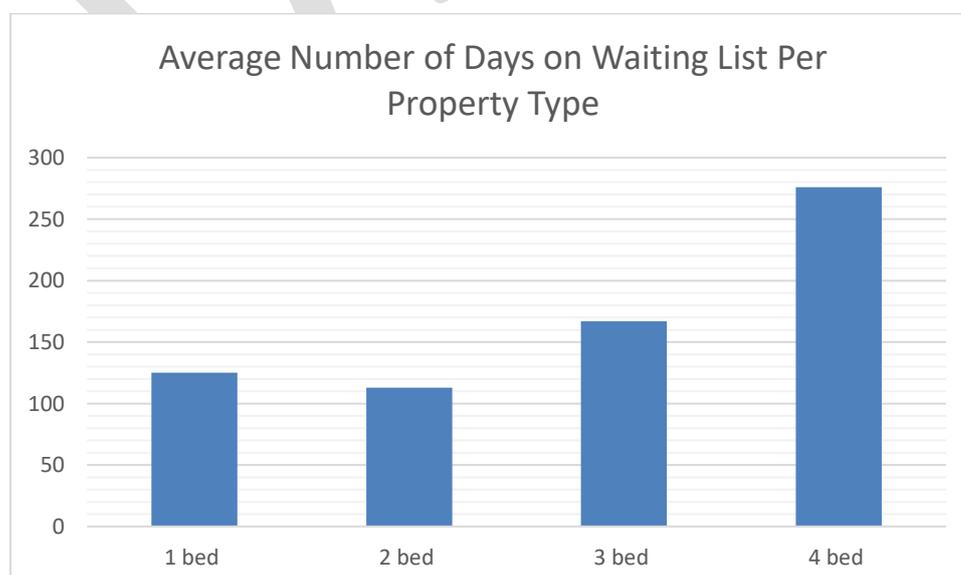
Demand for one bedroom properties remains the highest amongst both Homes Plus and Stafford Borough Council.

The highest property type and band in demand are people in Band B waiting for a 1-bed property (45 individuals, 30% of people on the waiting list).

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4+-bed	TOTAL	% of Waiting List
A	15	8	2	2	27	18%
B	45	26	10	3	84	56%
C	8	18	9	3	39	26%
D	0	0	0	0	0	0%
TOTAL	68	52	21	8	150	100%

The main reasons waiting list banding in Stafford Borough relates to duties owed in relation to homelessness (67%), followed by move on from supported accommodation (8%).

Waiting times vary depending on the individual households circumstances however indicative figures for average waiting times per property type is in the graph below:



Stafford Borough Council's Allocation Policy requires applicants to be considered nomination ready which means they would satisfy the lettings criteria of Housing Associations with accommodation in the Borough. Those who are not nomination ready have the option of being placed on the waiting list and accruing waiting time whilst they work with Housing Options to address their barriers to accessing social housing.

In 23/24, 38 households were accepted onto the waiting list but considered 'not nomination ready.' Of those recorded, the reason they were not nomination ready was due to not having all the documentation required to be put forward for a property, followed by rent arrears.

Nominations Agreements

Stafford Borough does not hold housing stock but has entered into nomination agreements with all Housing Associations with stock in the Borough. Households are nominated to properties in line with our Allocation Policy.

Registered Provider	% of rights within the Stafford Borough
Aspire	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Bromford	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Clarion Housing (Formerly Affinity)	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new build developments, 50% on subsequent lets
Homes Plus (Formerly Stafford and Rural Homes)	75% of net vacancies, including new builds
Homes Plus (Formerly South Staffordshire Housing Association)	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Midland Heart	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Platform Housing Group	75% of net vacancies
Sage Housing	100% of net vacancies
Sanctuary	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets

Staffs Housing (Formerly Staffordshire Housing Association)	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Walsall Housing Group	50% of net vacancies, 75% of first let of new builds, 50% of subsequent lets
Wrekin Housing Trust	100% of net vacancies

During 23/24, there have been 248 property nominations, with applicants moving into 95% of the properties received for nomination. 8 out of 12 failed nominations were with Wrekin Housing Trust.

For nearly one third of cases, more than one household is put forward for the property. This is due to both applicants refusing an offer of accommodation and the Housing Association refusing the applicant.

54% of nominations received are for a two bedroom need, with 27% for a one bedroom need, 16% for a three bedroom need and 3% for a four bedroom need.

10 Qualitative Data from Partner Agencies and Those with Lived Experience

In July 2024, we circulated a survey to partner agencies requesting their views on homelessness within Stafford Borough. Nine agencies responded (outlined below).

The partner agencies were:

Organisation Name	Type of organisation
Midland Heart	Supported Housing
Staffordshire County Council	Staffordshire County Council; Public Health Commissioning
Staffordshire Police	Police
Rising Brook	Community Church
MPFT - Social Worker - Specialist GP - Practice Lead - Tenancy Sustainment Officer	Mental Health Trust
Yellow Ribbon	Supported Housing
House of Bread	Charity
Staffordshire Women's Aid	Charity
Derventio	Supported Housing

Partner agencies were asked to provide the top 3 support needs in ranked order.

The top needs identified by partner agencies were:

- (1) Multiple and Complex Needs
- (2) Drug and Alcohol Dependency
- (3) Mental illness or disability

During the previous review 'Budgeting' and 'Physical illness or disability' were among the top 3 support needs identified. Out of all 41 responses to this question, only 1 response identified one of those needs. This highlights how the support needs have changed and become more complex. A supported housing provider highlighted that over 70% of their residents during 23/24 had multiple and complex needs, including 65% of all residents suffering from mental health issue.

Additional comments from organisations stated that "multiple complex needs are often a combination of mental health and addictions". One respondent highlighted that nearly everyone who is homeless has a "challenging history usually of abuse, followed by drug and alcohol use to manage the abuse, leading to a variety of other health problems". Dealing with these can be problematic due to "a stigma to people with mental health and substance use" and "a lack of temporary accommodation or emergency accommodation that say they can meet a person's needs". Furthermore, these multiple and complex needs mean "multi agencies support is vital with easy access".

12 out of the 12 responses said that their agency or service was impacted by homelessness.

"Being asked to leave by family or friends" was mentioned among the top 3 as consistent with what we see coming through the service, the most common reason mentioned is "end of tenancy due to anti-social behaviour (all tenures)" whilst "leaving prison" is perceived as the third most common cause.

The survey also highlighted that the main causes are not necessarily as obvious and therefore may be hard to tackle. Out of the 15 options given, all but two were given as a top-5 reason by at least one respondent, with over half of the answers being mentioned by 33% of the responses. Showing that the causes of homelessness can be complex and multi-faceted, with no one clear and obvious solution that can address the underlying cause.

All respondents answered 'yes' to whether they felt repeat homelessness was an issue.

Reasons for this response included loss of confidence in housing, mental health and addiction services", "lack of temporary accommodation in Stafford",

“lack of support in tenancy sustainment” and because people “do not engage long enough to develop any skills or work with services to manage their situations. Furthermore, rising living costs, including rent prices can make it more difficult for people to keep their homes.

Feedback suggested that individuals find themselves stuck in a cycle as they are “too high risk” and risk eviction when placed in accommodation due to addiction or mental health issues. This increases pressure on services individuals may return to hospital due to their housing situation leading to discharge issues, or may not have the support in place meaning the accommodation is often not suitable for their needs and the support they need.

One respondent identified there is “an ongoing cycle of homelessness despite attempts by partner organisations to break the cycle”, arguing that this is mainly a result due to “homeless individuals placed in short term accommodation which fails to meet their needs”. As a result, individuals either are “then evicted or leave as they feel threatened”. This is backed up by another respondent stating that “people always say they prefer to be on the streets than go to the hostels again” as there is a lack of “lower level supported accommodation and lack of emergency accommodation locally”.

However, even in cases where there is “successful housing of difficult clients in accommodation such as Turning Point or Eagle House”, other issues arise. It seems difficult to get individuals to get to the next stage meaning they either “block through-put or risk eviction for wayward behaviour”. This is often related to mental health issues. Multiple respondents identified that mental health issues are not properly supported and that there is a “lack of coping strategy” as a result of “instability in life” and “roots going back to childhood relating to self-worth”. Additionally, one respondent stated that “many people are often admitted to psychiatric hospital” and that due to their mental health they often become “stuck” in hospital, failing to move on.

Further issues around the homelessness cycle and issues after initial support is provided, were identified when we asked the partners to give reasons why tenancies fail. Again, mental health issues were mentioned as well as substance misuse and anti-social behaviour, which often are all related. Consultees suggested individuals may disengage from services, or it could lead to more serious issues such as domestic abuse, overdosing or financial exclusion.

The lack of supported accommodation was once again a key factor. One respondent identified that the private rented sector will often refuse while the housing options service “send majority of people to a hostel in Birmingham” as no local options are available. As a result, individuals have a “poor opinion

of Housing Services and so engagement drops off” and “they can’t get care and treatment, away from everything they know and their support network”.

We asked, ‘what do you think are the main causes of repeat homelessness in Stafford?’ Partner agencies were asked to provide their top 3 causes of repeat homelessness in ranked order.

The main causes identified were:

- Multiple and complex needs (identified by 4 respondents as the top reason)
- Lack of available support services (identified as a top 3 reason by half of the respondents)
- Drug use (considered among the top 2 reasons by over 40% of the respondents)

All possible causes listed in the survey were identified as a top 3 reason by at least one respondent, with over 6 reasons identified by at least 25% of respondents. The perceived causes of repeat homelessness from partner agencies demonstrates the importance of holistic housing and suitability of accommodation assessments in order to promote tenancy sustainment.

Partners were also asked about the wider impacts of homelessness on the individual, the community and other services. Most responses again identified physical and mental health issues which means individuals “become marginalised by services and society”, “lack of self-esteem, worth and stigma” or more serious risks such as self-harm or individuals could even consider to “end their life”.

This then increases pressure on services due to readmissions. This could cause delays in support due to “bed blocking” and a lack of resource and support services for the individual locally. People which are sent out of area often cannot get the right treatment, either causing a relapse of making the issues harder to resolve. GP practices are “increasingly reluctant to take on “high demanding” homeless patients” as other services are unable to support them. This overall lack of support and the subsequent decline in the mental and physical state of the individual, also gets noticed by society. One respondent points out that the attitude of society is “more extreme” whilst the “social media identification and abuse of homeless is worrying”.

Because of the increasing complexity of issues and need to work in partnership, the expected future demand on partner services needs to be understood and formed part of the survey.

Several respondents point out that this largely depends on housing solutions. They are often “not enough”, there is a “shortage of affordable housing” and

one partner pointed out that if more support could be given to services like Turning Point “the demand could be dramatically reduced” as it has reduced anti-social behaviour and public order issues in town.

An increase in affordable and supported housing supply would also alleviate issues around move-on strategies. Currently, people which are ready to move on “cannot find proper housing, leading to longer stays in temporary or supported housing”, creating bottlenecks in the system.

Partners further expect demand to increase due to ongoing challenges around youth homelessness. One supported accommodation provider pointed out that they have seen an increase in applications from people aged 18-24. Young people facing this issue often lack life skills, experience disruptions in their education and therefore may find job opportunities limited. This issue will add to the housing problem as lack of suitable housing options currently make the situation worse, adding to the already high demand on services.

The Housing Options Team recognise that that is a barrier to preventing and relieving homelessness for vulnerable groups, so we asked partner agencies ‘what do you consider are the main reasons for individual’s lack of engagement with services?’ As with previous questions, partner agencies were asked to provide the top 3 reasons in ranked order.

The most common reasons for individuals’ lack of engagement with services were:

- Individual support needs being too high for the services involved (amongst the top 3 reason for 67% of respondents)
- Mistrust for services (the most cited top reason as well as support needs being too high)
- Substance Misuse (amongst the top 3 of 50% of respondents)
- Mental illness or disability (cited as the second biggest reason by 25% of the respondents)

We asked, ‘Why do you think these are the main reasons?’ Partner agencies were asked to provide additional information to support their answers to the previous question.

Responses stated that support services “don’t want to accept patient with higher level of needs” and that priorities and expectations of rough sleepers “do not often match the priorities and expectations of the professionals”.

Other responses suggested that homeless individuals find it difficult to “engage as previous experience has been so negative” and that “getting support from services can be very bureaucratic”.

Furthermore, there was an acknowledgement that agencies are working “under pressure” and “stripped to the bare bones, or gone all together”. This could lead to services picking “easy wins rather than try and tackle complex problems”. Partners also need to work together as one “hasn’t got all the answers”. This may become increasingly difficult if there are not enough resources available to achieve the level of partnership work that would be required.

They also acknowledged that services could stop working with individuals if they are seen as difficult or not engaging. This lack of engagement means the individuals miss opportunities for support and then they become lost from services. This can lead to a deterioration of an individual’s physical and mental health and the person will continue to be homeless, which may eventually progress to entrenched homelessness.

As a result of an individual’s lack of engagement, individuals often end up feeling “unwanted” and become more isolated and entrenched as they feel services continually let them down. They “don’t want to be placed in hostels out of area” meaning they often decline exacerbating those feelings as well as feeling a lack of flexibility from professionals. Major health issues may not be addressed early enough, leading to high costs to services such as the NHS or potentially even early death.

Long-term, this also means individuals become increasingly unlikely to engage in the future and you are likely to get the same outcome. As one respondent put, “If those that are homeless are unable to change, then we, as professionals have to! There needs to be trust developed so that the clients can begin to make small changes”.

Partner agencies suggested the following ideas for tackling a lack of engagement:

- Keep trying to arrange visits / appointments with the individual / offering drop-in sessions that do not require a booked in appointment and visiting the individual in a place that they choose
- Personalised Support Plans, focusing on each person’s unique needs and setting out clear goals and steps on how to achieve them. This includes regular feedback and adaptation so that the individual and their opinions feel valued.
- Spending time to build a relationship with the individual to encourage engagement
- Setting up Peer Support Plans so people can connect with others who have similar experiences and are more relatable.
- Working with other partner agencies to establish a joint engagement strategy including joint visits.

- Increase in resource and staffing would provide opportunity for better outreach and preventative work.

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