



Stafford
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Economic Development
and Planning Scrutiny Committee held
at the Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford
on Wednesday 2 July 2025**

Chairman - Councillor F Beatty

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

Councillors:

B M Cross

A P Edgeller

F D J James

P W Jones

A M Loughran

D M McNaughton

B McKeown

J S Powell

D P Rouxel

Also present:-

Councillors A F Reid (Cabinet Member - Economic Development and
Planning Portfolio)
S N Spencer

Charlotte Cain - Visitor Economy Partnership Development Manager (*via
Teams for Minute EDP9 only*)

Officers in attendance:-

D Piper - Head of Economic Development and Planning
M Manning - Enterprise Growth Manager
J Allen - Democratic Services Officer

EDP7 Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2025, as previously circulated,
were approved as a correct record.

EDP8 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor P C Edgeller (substituted by
Councillor A P Edgeller)

EDP9 Tourism / Visitor Economy / Inward Investment

Charlotte Cain, Visitor Economy Partnership Development Manager,
Staffordshire County Council, gave a presentation regarding the work
undertaken since the last visit to the Scrutiny Committee. She also
referred to the successful UKREiiF event where a number of developers
and investors showed interest in the regeneration of Stafford's High Street.

It was agreed that the presentation be shared with the Scrutiny Committee.

The Enterprise Growth Manager delivered a further presentation and video highlighting the successes of recent projects within the Borough.

RESOLVED:- that

- a) in accordance with the powers delegated to the Committee the contents of the presentations be noted.
- b) DP and MM to review current and historical data relating to planning applications for potential visitor accommodation.
- c) Officers to review the proposed LVEP list of priorities for Stafford Borough and bring the outcome of this work to a future committee for consideration.

EDP10 Councillor Session - Councillor S N Spencer

Councillor S N Spencer has submitted a question to the Cabinet Member, Economic Development and Planning in accordance with paragraph 2.7(c)i of the Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules as follows:-

“There are significant back logs in the planning and enforcement departments. Enforcement appears to be being conducted on a cherry picked ‘easy win’ basis rather than on a case-by-case basis. As we know, the planning department is severely in back log. I have personally been waiting for close to two years for a call in to come to committee.

I am aware that the planning and enforcement departments have had a number of people leave their posts or on long term leave. Additionally, the ability to recruit to the Borough has, due to various factors, not been successful at this time.

Residents and Parish Councils within my ward are becoming increasingly frustrated and disillusioned with the Borough Council on matters of planning and enforcement. Planning and enforcement issues are going unanswered resulting in adverse impacts upon residents and the living/local environment. The Borough is spending significant amounts of money on acquiring various buildings within Stafford with associated planned schemes progressing. Whereas, residents are unable to complete or enforce building related issues that matter to them due to the severe back log in the system.

Can we funnel some of the money held in reserve towards bringing in additional contractors to enable both the planning and enforcement departments of the Borough to be able to work effectively and clear the backlog? We need to focus on this as a priority, especially with the upcoming unitary authority, shifting of budget and its affect on the planning process plus the ongoing impact of not having a local plan in place.”

Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning responded to the question as follows:

“The situation with the planning backlog is serious, is ongoing, and is a key reason for the new improvement plan recently approved by cabinet and now being implemented. There is a workshop for all councillors scheduled for July 15 where this plan will be explained in detail and where ward councillors can seek clarity on any elements of the proposed approach.

I want to take a moment to recognise the major achievements so far in the Planning team - all of it led by the Planning team themselves with my support. When we took over administration of the council the backlog was over 1,000 - it is less than half that today. The team immediately made arrangements to bring in additional contractors alongside other arrangements - and with the support of all cabinet parties - The Greens, Labour, and the Brough Independents - we did indeed fund this extra cost using planning reserves. It is vital that we did this - excessive planning backlogs are unacceptable and our planning team needed this support to handle the short-term extra workload. The team now tell me they need to reduce the average time it takes to handle each case, they have planned the changes for how to handle this, and are implementing this new improvement plan in the summer. Also, recruitment has occurred already, we are pleased with our new team members!

Yes there was better responsiveness to some types of applications: simpler applications that did not require much external body consultations could be handled rapidly and these were channelled via an outsourcing arrangement to ensure our officers could focus on the more difficult cases. It is often the need to consult others that has caused delays, and handling this is a key factor in bringing the backload down further. However, the team do not ‘cherry-pick’ easy cases: rather they balance the workload of simpler cases against the ones that need more detailed evidence so that the overall throughput is reasonable.

On enforcement, we have started the changes already. We have leveraged our arrangement with Cannock Chase to share their enforcement team lead and we have instituted a new cross-team approach to enforcement on complex cases. Recruitment has not been as successful as with the planning team, however - there is a national shortage in this function and we need to attract more candidates to our vacancies.

In summary, you are absolutely right to call this out. Our Planning team has made excellent efforts and achieved impressive results in the last two years - the backlog is less than half what it was, the responses to validations is way better than it was, and the team have fully engaged with the improvement plan to bed in long-term changes to how they work and how fast they can turn around applications.”

The Chair informed Members that Planning Enforcement would be an agenda item in October.

An email address for members with queries regarding planning and enforcement is in place dmqueries@staffordbc.gov.uk

It was noted that there is an adopted Local Plan in place. Also, that enforcement incorporates other departments, not just planning.

RESOLVED:- that in accordance with the powers delegated to the Committee question be noted and brought back to the committee in October 2025.

Councillor A P Edgeller left the meeting at this point.

EDP11 End of Year Performance Report 2024-25

The Head of Economic Development and Planning summarised the End of Year Performance Report and provided updates since the report had been published.

It was noted that there was a discrepancy on page 6, paragraphs 5.6 and 5.7 regarding the number of KPI's. DP confirmed that the total number is 33, with 7 under the remit of Economic Development and Planning.

DP reported that scheduling for Stafford Station Gateway would be clearer for 2025-26.

A typo was noted on page 10, third bullet point - should read 2024 not 2014.

RESOLVED:- that in accordance with the powers delegated to the Committee the contents of the report be noted.

EDP12 Business Planning Report

The Head of Economic Development and Planning summarised the End of Year Performance Report and provided updates since the report had been published.

The Committee felt that there was insufficient detail in the report and the language used was passive.

RESOLVED:- to

- a) delegate authority to the Chair to make amendments in advance of the Council meeting in consultation with the Head of Law and Governance.
- b) Draft Business Report to be a standard item on the agenda every March so that Members of the Committee have an input into the report

EDP13 Work Programme

Considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance, which presented the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for the forthcoming meetings.

Members were reminded that an additional meeting had been convened on 19 August 2025 regarding Protecting our Rivers and Oceans. The Chair asked that all Members be invited.

RESOLVED:- that

- a) in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, the Work Programme, subject to the amendments, be approved.

CHAIR