

Dear Members

### **Cabinet**

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held on **Thursday 15 May 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.



Head of Law and Governance

## **CABINET - 15 MAY 2025**

**Chair - Councillor A T A Godfrey**

### **AGENDA**

- 1 Minutes of 10 April 2025 as circulated and published on 11 April 2025
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Councillors' Question Time (if any)
- 4 Proposals of the Cabinet Members (as follows):-

#### **Page Nos**

#### **(a) COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO**

- |      |  |   |   |    |
|------|--|---|---|----|
| (i)  | Housing Options Funding 2025-26            | 3 | - | 7  |
| (ii) | Funding for Voluntary Sector Organisations | 8 | - | 23 |

#### **(b) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING PORTFOLIO**

- |      |   |    |   |    |
|------|---|----|---|----|
| (i)  | Development Management - External Review Outcome and Resource Request 2025/26 | 24 | - | 45 |
| (ii) | Stafford Town Centre Regeneration Capital Programme Change                    | 46 | - | 69 |

#### **PART CONFIDENTIAL**

**Report contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).**

### **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****Housing Options Funding 2025 - 2026**

<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	15 May 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Wellbeing
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Community Portfolio

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**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To request authority is delegated to Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member to agree the detailed spending of the Government allocated Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Funding 2025/2026.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The content of this report be noted and permission be given to delegate authority to the Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member to agree the detailed spending of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Funding 2025/2026.

**Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2.2 In December 2024, Government announced the local authority allocations of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Funding 2025/2026. To ensure smooth operation of the service and ensure no disruption, permission is requested to develop the spending programme, with delegated authority being given to the Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member to approve the final detailed spend, which is in line with grant purpose and the agreed Council budget.

**3 Key Issues**

- 3.1 As announced in the Autumn Budget, funding for homelessness services is increasing in 2025/2026 by £233 million compared to 2024/2025, bringing the total spend on homelessness and rough sleeping to nearly £1 billion for the coming financial year. The funding is to prevent rises in the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping which are crucial steps in ending homelessness.

- 3.2 Stafford Borough Council have been allocated a total of £731 338.00 for 2025/2026. This comprises of what was previously the Homeless Prevention Grant, Rough Sleeper Accommodation programme and Rough Sleeper Initiative.

## **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The funding allocation is to prevent and relieve homelessness which supports the Communities and Wellbeing Corporate Priority.

## **5 Report Detail**

- 5.1 Government funding for homelessness services is increasing in 2025/2026 by £233 million, compared to 2024/2025, bringing the total spend on homelessness and rough sleeping to over £1 billion for the coming financial year.
- 5.2 In December 2024, Government announced that Stafford Borough Council had been allocated a total of £731 338.00 across Homelessness and Rough Sleeping grant funding programmes.
- 5.3 The funding includes:
- Homeless Prevention Grant £429 232.00 (previously £335 684.00)
  - Rough Sleeper Prevention and Recovery Grant (previously Rough Sleeper Initiative) - £263 153.00 (amount remains the same as previous allocation)
  - Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme - £38 953.00 (amount remains the same as previous allocation, funding goes direct to provider via Homes England payment)
- 5.4 Funding is ringfenced to ensure local authorities can focus on preventing homelessness as well as funding the provision of temporary accommodation and to continue to embed the changes required through implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 5.5 The spend this year, and in previous years, of the Homeless Prevention and associated rough sleeper grants have been in line with Stafford's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020-2025 (which has recently been reviewed). Activity has covered prevention, relief and staffing activities alongside uplifts to supported accommodation and spend on temporary accommodation. All of these activities contribute towards the purpose of the grant which is ending rough sleeping and reducing the number of families in temporary accommodation. In 2024/2025, Stafford Borough Council worked with partner agencies to prevent over 1100 households were prevented from becoming homeless.

- 5.6 It is anticipated that future spend will be on these same broad activities, whilst expanding our collaborative working practices across our broader networks, including health services, social care and other sectors to prevent homelessness from occurring and provide offers of suitable accommodation that meets the needs of those facing homelessness. Projects for those experiencing rough sleeping such as Turning Point High Need Accommodation and Waythrough Housing First will continue to be funded.
- 5.7 Costings for the Homeless Prevention Grant are in the process of being established. Some flexibility is also required to respond to different pressure as they arise; for this reason it is requested that Cabinet delegates authority for the detail of the spend to be approved by the Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member so that delivery of this critical service can continue.
- 5.8 It is noted that in previous years Government have allocated additional in year grant funding for homelessness and rough sleeping. It is requested that Cabinet delegates such authority for the detail of the spend of such funding to be approved by the Head of Service in consultation with the Cabinet Member so that such funds can be committed within the financial year.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

MHCLG have confirmed the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Funding 2025/26, allocating Stafford Borough Council a total of £731 338.00.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping grant is ringfenced with the purpose to prevent the number of families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent homelessness, recognising that these are crucial steps to ending homelessness.

For 2025/26, MHCLG will introduce a new ringfence within the Homelessness Prevention Grant where 49% of the funding allocation must be spent on prevention, relief and staffing activity. The 49% within this ringfence may not be spent on temporary accommodation. In addition, existing grant conditions continue that include a requirement on the Council to submit accurate Homelessness Case Level Information Collection data, including full data on temporary accommodation numbers.

Any delegation of authority should there be given with the above conditions in mind. It would be prudent to ensure that all grant conditions relating to temporary accommodation numbers are met before the final 10% of each year's grant is committed to reduce any financial risk to the Council.

**6.2 Legal**

None

**6.3 Human Resources**

None

**6.4 Risk Management**

In recent years there has been unprecedented demand on Housing Options. Increase in demand on homeless applications and our temporary accommodation duty risks putting financial pressure on the Council. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Funding is being used to try and help people remain in their properties, find new accommodation and reduce the negative impact of homelessness, and the financial risk to the Council.

**6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

Funding programmes will be in line with the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2020 - 2025 (recently reviewed) that recognises that homelessness has a wider reaching impact on individuals with protected characteristics.

**6.6 Health**

Funding programmes will be in line with the existing Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023 -2023 whilst responding to pressures facing the service at present. The pressures facing the service recognise that health and housing are intertwined where homelessness is often a cause of wider support needs, including health inequalities. Funding programmes will look to increase collaborative working practices across our broader networks, including health services, social care and other sectors to prevent homelessness from occurring and provide offers of suitable accommodation that meets the needs of those facing homelessness.

**6.7 Climate Change**

None

**7 Appendices**

None

**8 Previous Consideration**

None

## 9 Background Papers

None

<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Hayley Smith
<b>Telephone Number:</b>	01785 619554
<b>Ward Interest:</b>	N/A
<b>Report Track:</b>	Cabinet 15 May 2025 (Only)
<b>Key Decision:</b>	N/A

**Agenda Item 4(a)ii**

## **Funding for Voluntary Sector Organisations**

<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	15 May 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Wellbeing
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Community Portfolio

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### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To approve the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Grant Policy which details how, and what, support will be given by the Council to voluntary sector organisations.
- 1.2 Recognising that Stafford Borough Council has renewed its Corporate Plan (2025-2028), and that work is underway to develop a Community Wellbeing Strategy, this report requests that Cabinet agree the grants currently given to voluntary sector organisations are extended by a 12-month period, back-dated from April 2025. This will allow time for the new policy to be agreed, and for the strategic framework that will guide applications to be set.

### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the VCSE Grant Policy, noting the changes made to the Assessment Criteria and the funding matrix within the policy, as a result of a previous call-in to the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the spend of £130,250 which will enable the extension of the current grant agreements until 31 March 2026.
- 2.3 That Cabinet notes the element of the policy which delegates the decision on allocation of funding to the Head of Wellbeing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities.



## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2.4 The Council have a long history of supporting the voluntary sector and working in partnership with them to deliver the Council's objectives and it is important that this close working continues. The grant funding had been operating for some years without review. Officers have now reviewed the arrangements and have drafted a Grant Policy which has set out funding aims to address key priority areas, the requirements of the applicant and the allocation process.
- 2.5 Due to the Community Wellbeing Strategy, which will guide applications, being in the process of development, the policy can't be implemented immediately. Therefore, the recommendation is to roll over the current agreements until 31 March 2026.

## **3 Key Issues**

- 3.1 The Council recognises the value and significant contribution that the voluntary and community sector provide to our communities and the role they play in supporting the delivery of our corporate objectives. To facilitate this, the Council has been providing financial support to 7 community and voluntary sector organisations, with grants totalling £130,250 per year, for the past 4 years to help them provide these services. The Council's ongoing investment would enable the sector to continue adding value.
- 3.2 In order to continue to support our communities and the organisations that provide vital services to them, it is fair to extend the current agreements for one year while the Community Wellbeing Strategy is finalised.

## **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 This supports the delivery of Stafford Borough Council's Corporate Plan Priority 2 - Communities and Wellbeing, and all supporting objectives within.

## **5 Report Detail**

- 5.1 This report has previously been heard at Cabinet on 20 February 2025. Following a call-in at the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 20 March 2025, alterations have been made to the Assessment Criteria section of the policy - including a revised and weighted matrix. This amendment ensures maximum transparency and accountability in the process, whilst ensuring that funding delivers the greatest impact within the Borough.
- 5.2 The Council has provided support to the voluntary sector for a number of years through a variety of different sources. This includes:
- Commissioning of local projects and services that support the delivery of the Council's corporate business objectives.

- Direct support of 7 voluntary sector organisations with grants totalling £130,250 per annum. 6 organisations have grant agreements with the Council which are monitored on a quarterly basis, and 1 organisation administers 2 grant schemes on behalf of the Council. Detailed support is as follows:-
    - Citizens Advice Bureau - £60,000
    - Support Staffordshire - Stafford District - £22,250
    - Staffordshire Women's Aid - £15,000
    - Stafford District Arts Council - £10,000
    - Katharine House Hospice - £3,500
    - Douglas MacMillan Hospice - £2,500
    - Stafford Borough Small Grants Scheme - £10,000 (administered by the Community Foundation)
    - Stafford Borough Sports Grants Scheme - £7,000 (administered by the Community Foundation)
- 5.3 The last 4 years have seen significant challenges for residents, and the voluntary sector in Stafford Borough. The COVID pandemic impacted on everyone, and for many people continues to do so. This is coupled with the cost-of-living crisis which has led to a considerable increase in levels of demand for VCSE services. This increase, alongside limited funded, has led many VCSE organisations to adapt and adjust their business delivery models, revise their use of finances and draw on reserves.
- 5.4 It is important that there is clarity and a shared understanding of the funds' core purpose, which is to support residents of Stafford Borough. Whilst we understand the importance of supporting the VCSE sector and the role they play, the grant funding should not be too heavily relied on by VCSE organisations. Repeating the application process every year will ensure the funded activities are focused, however applicants will have the opportunity to apply for up to 3 years funding (subject to an annual evaluation), if that is in the best interest of the project.
- 5.5 Grant applications will be assessed by a panel of Officers from Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Communities, in line with the Assessment Criteria section of the policy. Successful applications will be approved by the Head of Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Communities.

- 5.6 An update on the outcome of the panel decisions and details of the funded projects will be reported to the Community Wellbeing Partnership and included in the annual performance update to the Scrutiny Panel. However, details on individual bid information will not be shared, as this will not be in the public domain.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

Budget provision exists for this to be extended until 31 March 2026.

### **6.2 Legal**

The recommendations will allow the current grants to continue for a period of 12 months offering a period of stability in the services being provided under the current grants while the new policy is rolled out for the 2026/27 financial year. The policy has the potential to increase transparency and fairness in the selection of funded VCSEs and drive better performance through a weighted selection process. The policy may increase the administrative burden of carrying out the selection process and there is a low risk that organisations losing out on the grants may seek reasons for their bids being rejected or legal recourse when they fail to secure grant funding under the policy. In order to mitigate such risk, application procedures and weighting criteria need to be clearly set out and adhered to.

### **6.3 Human Resources**

None

### **6.4 Risk Management**

None

### **6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

None

### **6.6 Health**

The recommendations will help to contribute towards the delivery of priorities, as to be set within the Community Wellbeing strategy.

### **6.7 Climate Change**

None

## **7 Appendices**

Appendix 1: Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Grant Policy

## **8 Previous Consideration**

Cabinet - 20 February 2025 - Minute No CAB63/25

Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee - 20 March 2025 - Minute No CWB33/25

## **9 Background Papers**

Cabinet - 20 February 2025

<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Oliver Greatbatch
<b>Telephone Number:</b>	01543 464477
<b>Ward Interest:</b>	All
<b>Report Track:</b>	Cabinet 15 May 2025 (Only)
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes

# **Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Grant Policy**

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	8
2. Scope of policy .....	8
3. Eligibility .....	8
4. What can be funded .....	9
5. Application process .....	10
6. Appication criteria .....	11
7. Assessment criteria .....	10
8. Decision making .....	12
9. Grant conditions .....	12
10. Monitoring and evaluation .....	13

### Appendix I - Funding Matrix

## 1. Introduction

Stafford Borough Council (SBC or 'the Council') recognises the significant contributions made by the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors in providing projects and services that improve the social and community wellbeing of the borough.

Although not statutorily obliged to provide grant support, where funding allows, the Council is committed to financially supporting the VCSE sector organisations to deliver projects and activities which have a positive and beneficial impact on local communities and residents within the Borough.

The key aims of allocating grants are:

- To provide financial support which helps strengthen or widen the provision of facilities and services within the borough of Stafford.
- To positively support and address identified issues that are affecting local communities and residents.
- Ensure long term differences are made to those who benefit from the service or activity being delivered.

As well as helping communities develop, working closely with the VCSE sector in Stafford Borough also helps deliver and add value to the Council's own services, and meet the business objectives set out in its Corporate Plan.

## 2. Scope of policy

This policy is intended to:

- Guide the allocation of funding, ensuring decisions are consistent, fair and transparent
- Provide a coordinated and transparent funding service to the VCSE sector
- Ensure a sustainable approach to funding, focused on achieving value for money

## 3. Eligibility

### Who can make an application?

The following organisations are eligible to submit an application for funding:

- Registered charities
- Not-for-Profit (NFP) businesses

- Community Interest Companies (CIC)
- Community-based organisations
- Town and parish Council's within Stafford Borough

### **Exclusions**

The following are not eligible to submit applications for funding:

- Individuals
- Other local authorities
- Public sector bodies, or organisations that are funded by other public sector or statutory bodies - for example, schools and GP practices
- Groups who raise funds on behalf of an ineligible organisation or who will create or improve facilities which will predominately benefit an ineligible organisation
- Profit-based businesses

## **4. What can be funded**

The following costs are deemed allowable as part of any grant application:

- Core running costs including employee costs
- Programme or activity costs which are directly relevant to the application
- Travel and transport costs associated with events in Stafford Borough
- Hire or purchase of equipment for meeting project needs, including sports equipment
- Venue hire (excluding hire of group's own premises) relating to the application and any technical assistance
- Publicity and marketing (subject to agreement from the Council)
- Volunteer expenses

The following cannot be funded through any allocation of grant funding:

- Projects where there is statutory funding provision available



- Capital projects – such as building or refurbishment work
- Projects to be delivered outside of Stafford Borough
- Projects which are discriminatory, political, or religious in nature
- Costs that can be claimed back from elsewhere e.g. VAT
- Costs towards banking charges or repayment of debt
- Retrospective costs e.g. completed activities
- Gifts and prizes
- Alcohol
- Works to facilities that are/should be subject to an insurance claim

## **5. Application process**

The Council is committed to ensuring an open, fair, and transparent application process for all grant allocations.

For all available grants, the information provided by the Council to prospective applicants will include:

- The amount of money that is available in total
- Clear information on the purposes for which funding is offered
- The time scale in which projects will be delivered (funding will be made available for projects lasting up to 3 years as a maximum - subject to annual evaluations)
- Clear information on eligibility, application and assessment criteria
- A full list of conditions that will apply to the grant, including linking to the corporate objectives of the Council and the Community Wellbeing Strategy
- The deadline by which applications must be submitted
- The date by which applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application

## **6. Application criteria**

Organisations applying for funding must fulfil all of the following criteria:

- Have an existing constitution, articles or rules in place which describes the groups aims and objectives, its membership, and details of how decisions are made
- Have been established for more than 12 months
- Must provide services or activities for the benefit of residents and communities in Stafford Borough
- Be in a position to provide previous accounts, and have a bank account in the name of the organisation or group who will receive any funding – the account must require at least two joint signatures, from individuals who are not related, for all transactions
- Have in place the necessary policies and procedure to fulfil legal and financial requirements, e.g. accounts, health and safety, equal opportunities, insurance, safeguarding and demonstrate compliance with employment legislation and good practice
- Be able to meet the Council's requirements for delivering performance monitoring and accountability for the use of public funding
- Be able to demonstrate the necessary ability to provide good quality services, with accreditation where appropriate
- Promote equalities within their structure and operations

Applications may be screened out at this stage if they do not meet the eligibility and application criteria as set within this policy.

## **7. Assessment criteria**

All grant applications which meet eligibility and application criteria will be assessed using the weighted Funding Matrix in Appendix I. Applications will be scored on the following areas:

- Project Need and Significance
- Project Methodology
- Project Goals and Objectives
- Organisational Experience
- Value for Money

- Health and Safety (inc. Safeguarding)
- Equalities and Diversity

## **8. Decision making**

Grant applications will be assessed by a panel of Officers from Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Communities.

All successful applications will be approved by the Head of Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Communities.

All applicants will receive confirmation informing them of whether they have been successful or not as soon as possible after the panel has made its decision.

Complaints about any aspect of the community grant process will be dealt with under the Council's [Complaints Procedure](#).

There is no right of appeal as to the grant decision itself.

## **9. Grant conditions**

Any funding award is made in agreement to the following conditions:

- Where required the applicant will enter into a Grant Agreement with the Council
- Funding can only be spent on the project/service as described in the application and for no other purpose
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- If expenditure of the project/service is less than stated in the application, the grant amount paid will be reduced
- Any unspent funds must be returned to the Council
- Details of how the funding was spent, evidenced with copies of receipts, accounts and performance must be provided to the Council in line with the Grant Agreement
- Stafford Borough Council will be acknowledged and invited to participate in any appropriate publicity of the project

## **10. Monitoring and evaluation**

The Council needs to ensure best value from its funding and to ensure the financial support that it gives to organisations makes a real difference to the residents and communities within Stafford Borough.

Project monitoring meetings will be scheduled to allow the Council to assess whether an organisation is satisfying the terms and conditions of the grant and is able to manage their financial and legal responsibilities.

Organisations who are allocated funding will also be expected to produce self-monitoring reports on progress each quarter, using the Council's monitoring report template. All grant recipients will be required to produce an end of year evaluation report using the Council's template. These reports will be collated and reported to Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

**Appendix I - Funding Matrix**

This matrix provides a framework for evaluating grant applications against key criteria.

**Instructions**

- Review each application thoroughly.
- For each criterion, assign a score (1-5) based on the following rating scale:
  - 1 (Poor) Fails to adequately address the criterion or demonstrates significant weaknesses
  - 2 (Fair) Partially addresses the criterion, but has notable limitations or areas for improvement
  - 3 (Good) Adequately addresses the criterion and demonstrates a solid understanding
  - 4 (Very Good) Comprehensively addresses the criterion
  - 5 (Excellent) Exceptionally addresses the criterion
- Multiply the score by the weighting for that criterion to get the Weighted Score.
- Add all Weighted Scores to determine the Total Weighted Score.
- Interpretation of Total Weighted Score:
  - 120 - 150 Highly Recommended for Funding
  - 119 - 90 Recommended for Funding with Minor Revisions
  - 89 - 60 Potential for Funding with Significant Revisions
  - Below 60 Not Recommended for Funding

Criteria	Commentary	Weighting	Score	Weighted Score
Project Need and Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear statement of project significance.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of need within the Borough.</li> <li>- Clear alignment with funder priorities.</li> </ul>	5	5 (example)	25 (example)
Project Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear evidence of project outline.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of logical and appropriate methodology, structure and delivery planning.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of appropriate management and staffing capabilities to deliver the project.</li> </ul>	5	5 (example)	25 (example)
Project Goals and Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear evidence of SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.</li> </ul>	5	5 (example)	25 (example)
Organisational Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear evidence of experience and expertise within the organisation.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of previous success.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of previous collaborative working.</li> </ul>	3	5 (example)	15 (example)

Criteria	Commentary	Weighting	Score	Weighted Score
Value for Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear evidence of realistic and justified budget.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of cost-effectiveness.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of appropriate allocation of resources.</li> <li>- Clear evidence of sustainability beyond grant period.</li> </ul>	4	5 (example)	20 (example)
Health and Safety (inc. Safeguarding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear evidence of health and safety, duty of care, and other appropriate best practice requirements - including safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and the organisations' ability to successfully manage these.</li> </ul>	5	5 (example)	25 (example)
Equalities and Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear evidence of equality, diversity and inclusivity within the organisation.</li> </ul>	3	5 (example)	15 (example)
<b>Total Weighted Score</b>				150 (example)

**Agenda Item 4(b)i**

## **Development Management - External Review Outcome and Resource Request 2025/26**

<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	15 May 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Economic Development and Planning
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Economic Development and Planning

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### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This update report aims to inform Cabinet on the outcome of the external independent review of the Council's Development Management service and set out next steps.

### **2 Recommendations**

That: -

- 2.1 Cabinet notes the report, the findings of the external review at Appendix 1, and notes the Service Plan and Improvement Plan set out at Appendix 2 and 3.
- 2.2 That Cabinet agree to the resource proposals for Development Management and Planning Enforcement for 2025/26 which will maintain current service delivery whilst the improvement plan is being implemented.
- 2.3 That Cabinet recommends to Council the drawdown of £234,790 from planning/ fee reserves to fund agency staff to maintain service delivery whilst the improvement plan is being implemented and funding for consultancy support to support delivery of the improvement plan. The funding will be in addition to the approved 2025/26 budget.

#### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2.4 Development Management is a key statutory service of the Council, and Cabinet have requested an update on the external review of the service.



### **3 Key Issues**

- 3.1 The Cabinet has received various reports setting out the issues facing the Development Management (DM) service at SBC and has received an overview of the measures being taken by officers to improve performance, tackle backlogs, reduce complaints and increase confidence in the service from key customers.
- 3.2 To address issues with the service and improve performance, the Council has commissioned consultants to undertake an independent review and work to develop an improvement plan for the service, identifying clear actions and resource requirements.

### **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The Development Management service contributes to the delivery of all the Council's corporate priorities.

### **5 Report Detail**

#### **Background**

- 5.1 To help address issues within the Council's Development Management service and improve service delivery and value for money, the Council has commissioned an external independent review of the service.
- 5.2 An organisation called Mondrem were appointed in October 2024 to undertake the review. Mondrem are a not-for profit social enterprise whose purpose is to improve public services, and they are based on the Science and Innovation Park at Keele University. Mondrem have worked with more than 30 local authority planning services on a variety of projects, including supporting local planning services with performance challenges to become exemplar and to help good services become better. Many of the reviews they have undertaken have been run alongside corporate transformation initiatives.
- 5.3 The output of the review is an improvement plan for the next 12 months, including clear recommendations, actions, and resource requirements. The review has considered wider transformation options and recommendations for the sharing of SBC and Cannock Chase Council's Development Management Service. Members have been involved in the review, along with key stakeholders and agents/applicants.

#### **The scope of the review**

- 5.4 The review has covered all elements of the Development Management service, from pre-application, validation, assessment of applications, determination of applications, appeals, planning enforcement and process/systems.

## Review objectives

5.5 The objectives are as follows:

- To help the service meet its statutory requirements
- To help the service play its part in delivering corporate priorities and objectives
- To provide a baseline assessment of performance and service delivery
- To understand the team's workload and capacity to do it now and in the future
- To show how the service can increase productivity
- To show how the service can improve efficiency
- To help make sure that the Council can deliver high performance consistently
- To explore the service's role in promoting economic development in the Borough
- To explore how the service can help attract investment to the Borough
- To explore how the service can offer a solution-focused approach
- To assess the relationship between the Development Management (DM) and planning policy team and developing and delivering the local plan
- To co-design a short-term implementation plan and transformation options assessment that will help you deliver the required short-term improvements and longer-term vision
- To help you and the planning team to connect with, value and want to drive an improvement project based on this plan
- To identify how the Council can deliver its ambition for a great Development Management service in a realistic timeframe
- To help identify a preferred operating model for each element of the service
- To identify the resources and capacity needed to deliver transformation
- To explore how these and other resource needs can be met within the approved budget
- To set out any additional budget and resources that may be needed

## Review - findings

5.6 Mondrem held 51 confidential, semi-structured interviews with the team, customers and stakeholders to understand how things are now, what would be better and any barriers there are to making improvements. Thematic qualitative analysis of these interviews, along with quantitative analysis of workload and capacity was delivered first to the Operational Management team in December 2024 and then to the wider planning teams in January 2025.

5.7 The findings of the consultant are set out in a report at **APPENDIX 1**.

- 5.8 High levels of work-in-progress remains a major barrier to making changes happen, despite intense and successful efforts to reduce the number of undetermined applications on hand. Responding to “failure demand” caused by high levels of work in progress requires additional resources and costs the service more money.
- 5.9 Mondrem facilitated workshops with the whole planning service during January 2025, in which the team drafted a purpose statement, a vision statement and co-designed a service plan (Appendix 2 – service plan) to deliver the vision.
- 5.10 The planning service has subsequently spent time working with Mondrem to develop an Improvement Plan (Appendix 3 - improvement plan) to manage the activities from the service plan and to prioritise their time and resource to make improvements.
- 5.11 The service intends in their service and improvement plan to:
- Reduce workloads to healthy levels by setting a stretch target to reduce work in progress i.e. numbers of on-hand planning applications and applications awaiting validation. This will be instigated via ‘Short Interval Management’ which focuses on streamlining processes/procedures and intense management of performance and caseloads with the aim of significantly improving productivity levels of the service.
  - To provide options and recommendations for increasing income from non-statutory services like Planning Performance Agreements for major applications and providing a timely, reliable, paid-for preapplication advice offering for all other application types.
  - Create a trusting and confident culture for the whole planning service.
  - Communicate better with customers.
  - Set new performance metrics.
- 5.12 This work must be supported by the wider Council to deliver success. Leadership Team and the planning team acknowledge the challenging environment that the planning team have been operating in for a sustained period, this has been identified in the feedback from the consultant. The planning team now need to enact their improvement plan and will be supported by Leadership Team to do things differently, learn new skills, and change processes and procedures with the aim of building trust in the service. There will be resources provided to support delivery of the plan but in return there will be accountability for making progress and challenge applied throughout the lifetime of the project.

**Next steps**

- 5.13 The delivery of the improvement plan requires good governance and project management to ensure that project progress, as well as risks and issues with progress are transparent and that issues can be escalated and resolved as early as possible.
- 5.14 A Project Initiation Document (Appendix 4) has been agreed by Leadership Team and a Project Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive - Place has been established and will meet regularly during the lifetime of the project. The team is fully engaged and bought into the project.
- 5.15 As set out in the report there is the potential that the full benefits of the improvement plan will not be realised, but there is a willingness and desire from the team to move forward improvements to the service and work towards achieving the vision and objectives that are set out in the team's service plan.

**Resourcing for 2025/26**

- 5.16 Officers have undertaken an assessment of the capacity and skills needed to ensure that the Development Management and Planning Enforcement functions have sufficient resources during 2025/26.

**Development Management**

- 5.17 The DM service has seen a phased reduction of Agency staff over the last 12 months. A number of appointments have been made to the team at Planning Assistant and Planning Officer level which has filled vacancies, improved capacity and reduced the reliance on agency staff. There is currently 1 agency senior planner providing additional capacity for 30 hours per week.
- 5.18 Despite the recent appointments, there will be a need to continue with some agency staff during 2025/26. It will be necessary to extend the current Agency Team Leader post which is covering the vacant Deputy Development Manager role. It will also be necessary to appoint an agency Senior Planning Officer following the recent resignation of a Senior Planning Officer. To ensure continuity and resilience it is proposed to retain the use of the agency senior planner for 30 hours per week, and the agency team leader for 37 hours per week for a period of 6 months.
- 5.19 The intention is to delete the vacant Deputy Development Manager post and replace this with a third permanent Development Lead role. This will involve a review of the job role and evaluation before the recruitment process can commence. This post is necessary to ensure there is sufficient decision making capacity. The Senior Planning Officer role will also need to be advertised. Any suitable external candidate to these posts is likely to be required to give 2 or 3 months notice, hence the proposal for 6 months agency cover.

- 5.20 The re-introduction of the full pre-application service has the potential to create additional revenue which will help offset the cost of recruitment of additional staff.
- 5.21 Furthermore, as part of the Improvement Plan, the team intends to introduce Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) for larger and more complex applications, these voluntary agreements provide applicants with an enhanced service and are particularly useful for time critical projects. The PPA may cover any part of the development process and is most often used for the pre-application to consent stage. They also provide the Council with the opportunity to generate additional income to fund additional resources to service the PPAs. The Development Manager is currently developing a PPA template and process with the intention of making this service available to applicants in Summer 2025.
- 5.22 To support delivery of the planning improvement plan, Mondrem have been retained to provide additional support to the team in relation to project management, governance, data analysis, process improvement. The cost of this support is £26,000 and will be funded from the additional budget requested which will be funded from planning fee reserve income.

### **Enforcement**

- 5.23 As reported to Cabinet in November 2024, Planning Enforcement is a discretionary service. It is not compulsory for an LPA to act against a breach of planning control or to take further action. However, the service has a high profile and there is an expectation that the Council will investigate potential breaches of planning action and act where it is expedient and deemed to be in the public interest.
- 5.24 The current staffing structure comprises 3 staff, 1 Senior Enforcement Officer and 2 Enforcement Officers, but all 3 posts are currently vacant. There is a challenge for many councils in obtaining and retaining suitable planning enforcement staff - there is a national shortage of experienced planning enforcement staff, and many experienced staff have chosen to work as agency staff due to the significantly higher remuneration.
- 5.25 In January 2025, a temporary planning enforcement provision across SBC and CCDC was introduced utilising 3 x agency Enforcement Officers with supervisory support from a permanent CCDC officer. This arrangement will be in place for at least 12 months, pending the development of a full business case for sharing.

### **Actions to be taken during 2025/26**

- 5.26 Agency Enforcement Officers are expensive, and the current budget is insufficient to fund the existing level of Agency Enforcement officers.
- 5.27 It is proposed during 2025/26 to go out externally to try to recruit 3 x FTE Enforcement Officers. The vacant roles have been reviewed and the salaries are being evaluated to ensure that the scope of role/salary is attractive, with the aim of attracting qualified and experienced candidates to reduce the need for agency Enforcement Officers.
- 5.28 However, to ensure service delivery can be maintained, there will be a need to continue with Agency provision until such time the vacant posts are filled. There is a budget implication of having 3 x FTE agency Enforcement Officers for 2025/26. The worst case financially is that it is not possible to recruit to any of the 3 Enforcement Officer vacancies, and the retention of 3 agency enforcement officers for the full year would cost £152,525 over the budgeted position. This amount will be included within the £234,790 additional budget requested for 25/26.

## **6 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

The cost of the external review that has already taken place has been funded from a drawdown of funds from the council's planning fee reserve.

The report requests 3 additional agency posts in relation to enforcement at a worse case for 12 months at a cost of £152,525 above the current budget. There is also additional agency costs forecast for planning as set out in paragraph 5.19, the additional cost above the budget is £56,265.00

As set out in paragraph 5.23 it is intended for Mondrem to provide ongoing support during the implementation phase of the recommendations. This will cost £26,000.

The total cost of all of the additional items is £234,790 and this will be met from the planning fee reserve.

### **6.2 Legal**

None

### **6.3 Human Resources**

None

## **6.4 Risk Management**

A risk register will be developed for the Improvement Project. The key risks are identified in the report.

## **6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

None

## **6.6 Health**

None

## **6.7 Climate Change**

None

## **7 Appendices**

None

## **8 Previous Consideration**

Cabinet - 7 November 2024 - Minute No CAB34/24

## **9 Background Papers**

None

**Contact Officer:** Dean Piper

**Telephone Number:** 01543 464223

**Ward Interest:** All

**Report Track:** Cabinet 15 May 2025 (Only)

**Key Decision:** N/A



## Stafford DM Improvement Project

A summary of the work so far, the opportunities and risks ahead for the Chief Executive and Cabinet.

Publish Date 14-Feb-25

Prepared for Dean Piper, Head of Economic Development & Planning, Stafford & Cannock Councils

Prepared by: Lucy Gibbs, Head of Client Solutions, Mondrem

Contact: [lucy.gibbs@mondrem.co.uk](mailto:lucy.gibbs@mondrem.co.uk)

Mondrem Group, Innovation Centre 7, Keele University Science and Innovation Park, Staffordshire, ST5 5NU

[talkwithus@mondrem.co.uk](mailto:talkwithus@mondrem.co.uk)

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Mondrem Group  
[www.mondrem.co.uk](http://www.mondrem.co.uk)



## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Methodology .....	3
Review of the planning service.....	3
Making plans .....	4
Supporting information.....	4
Case studies.....	4
A view of the future for Stafford.....	5
Opportunities .....	6
Objectives .....	6
Conditions for Success .....	6
Risks .....	7
Potential for mistakes.....	7
Conclusion.....	8



## Executive Summary

In November 2024 Mondrem reviewed Stafford Borough Council's planning service and found several common goals shared between the service's staff, the leadership team, its customers and stakeholders. These included better turnaround times for planning applications, better communication with customers, elected Members and the public and making the planning service a more professionally rewarding place to work, with a better reputation.

The team has been working to identify objectives and to understand what activity will be needed to achieve their vision for the future built on these shared goals. They have an opportunity to add an extra 35-115% extra capacity by increasing productivity and reducing the number of applications 'on hand'. Changes which will prompt a shift from complaints to compliments and political pain to political calm. The team are also in the process of implementing an attractive and value-for-money preapplication advice service and developing a customer charter with a communications strategy for customers and stakeholders.

The team now need to enact their plan, be held to account for making progress on it in an organised and disciplined way and supported to try new things. They will need to learn new skills and behaviours and unlearn old ones. Some of this will be difficult and none of us is perfect, so they will likely make mistakes along the way. They will need that to be acknowledged and accepted. And to be supported when it happens. Transformation requires trust and investment, can be challenging. It requires strong, consistent leadership and observable change from the teams delivering it. The leadership of the Council, both elected and executive, can make successful outcomes more likely. And equally, has the power to quash the commitment to transformation that is so essential to its success. To do this will mean extending trust where there is none. And being prepared to bear the short-term pain that accompanies transformation efforts and keep the prize in mind. The work so far suggests the prize can be a significant one.

This report outlines what has happened in the last four months and gives an outline of the improvement project to begin building that trust in the service.

## Methodology

### Review of the planning service

Mondrem held 51 confidential, semi-structured interviews with the team, customers and stakeholders to understand how things are now, what would be better and any barriers there are to making improvements. Thematic qualitative analysis of these interviews, along with quantitative analysis of workload and capacity (Appendix I – feedback presentation) was delivered first to the Operational Management team in December 2024 and then to the wider planning teams in January 2024.

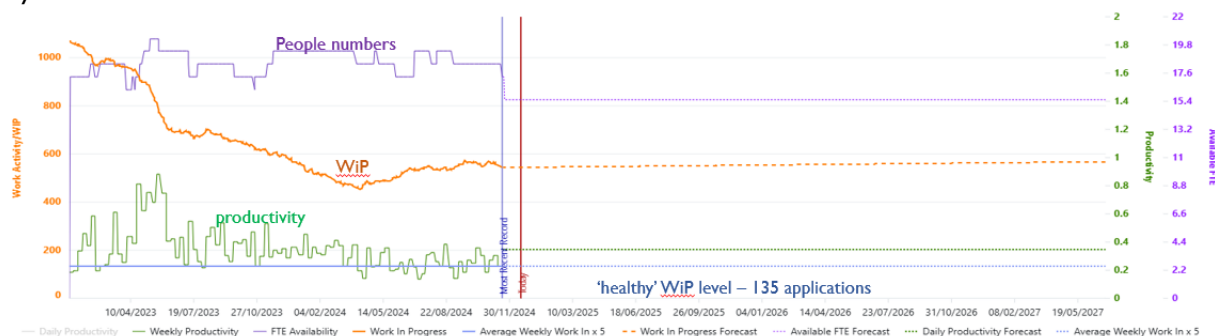
The findings of the report were that there is a cultural issue within Stafford Borough Council, not limited to the planning service, with most interviewees reporting feeling like they were not trusted by, and did not trust, their leaders. Leaders also reported that it was difficult to understand why the DM service has not been clear or convincing that they understand the issues and underperformance, nor how they will make improvements happen. Silos have formed between DM and Forward Planning and between Planning and other services within the Council. Planning budgets have been formed without the input of the Planning Manager and so budget targets are less likely to be delivered. The changes to the current Planning software, that would enable efficiency savings, have not yet been made, because the IT service understands the intention is to replace the system when the shared service is formed



with Cannock. IT also have competing priorities for their time and Planning is not at the top of their priority list.

High levels of work-in-progress remains a major barrier to making changes happen, despite intense and successful efforts to reduce the number of undetermined applications on hand. Responding to “failure demand” caused by high levels of work in progress requires additional resources and costs the service more money.

Figure 1: Total work-in-progress for Stafford Borough Council. Average productivity throughout 2023 and 2024 is 0.36 decisions per person per day. Since Jan 2024 average productivity is 0.28 decisions per person per day.



## Making plans

Mondrem facilitated a meeting for the service in January 2025 with the whole planning service, in which the team drafted a purpose statement, a vision statement and began to co-design a service plan to deliver their vision. The project then paused for 3 weeks whilst a shared understanding of expectations was agreed at Stafford. Without the shared understanding of expectations being agreed during this 3 week period, there would have been the strong prospect that the improvement project would fail in the future due to lack of visible support and scrutiny. Mondrem extended the timescales of the project through this pause at no extra cost to the Council.

The team have now developed their service plan (Appendix 2), and with support from Mondrem have drafted an improvement plan (Appendix 3) to outline the tasks and sub-tasks that will be needed to achieve the objectives they have set and allow for resource allocation. The DM Manager and Development Business Manager have also been trained on simple, effective project management and governance tools to ensure that project documentation, support and scrutiny is robustly set up, organised and disciplined.

## Supporting information

### Case studies

Mondrem have had serial success at helping LPAs to create a professionally rewarding place to work and delight customers and stakeholders with excellent service levels. In all cases, these have been achieved by a combination of protecting the team from ‘failure demand’, trusting that they are dedicated professionals who want to do a good job and creating additional capacity through increasing productivity. Each LPA’s journey has been slightly different, because the problems have been at a different scale, with different causes of depressed productivity, but the Workview charts below illustrate the real WIP reduction achieved by implementing an improvement plan along the principles that Stafford have developed.



Figure 2: A WiP chart for a DM team for a City Council in the North of England. Average productivity at the beginning of recording was 0.3 decisions per person per day, the team's productivity increased to 0.64 decisions throughout 2023 and have maintained this productivity, an increase of 113%



Figure 3: A WiP chart for a DM team in a London borough. Average productivity in 2022 was 0.7 and from 2023 onwards has been maintained at 0.93 decisions per person per day, an increase of 33%

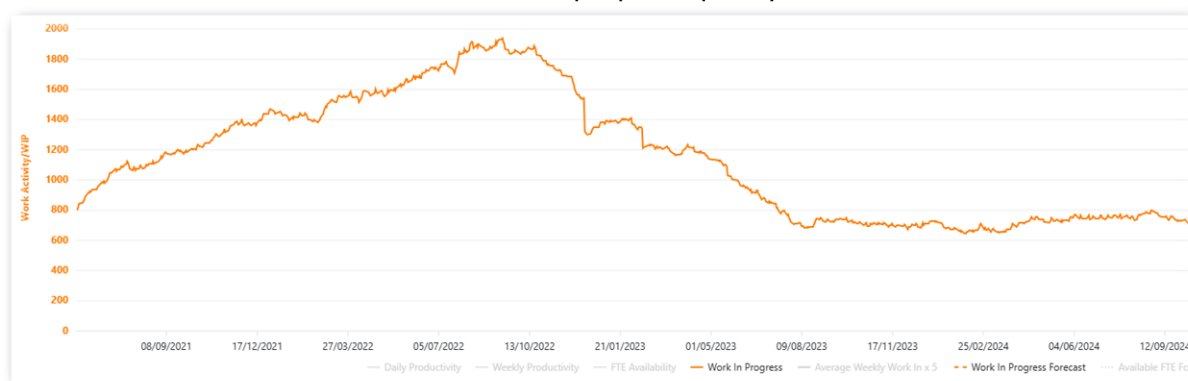


Figure 4: A WiP chart for a DM team for a City Council in Southern England. Productivity in 2023 was 0.44 decisions per person per day and 0.58 for 2024, an increase of 32%

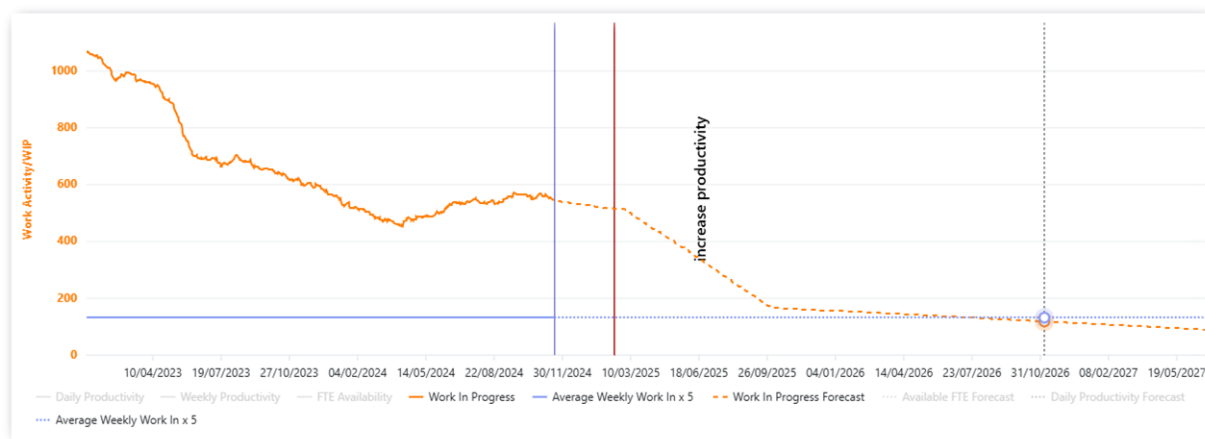


## A view of the future for Stafford

If Stafford were to increase productivity to 0.5 decisions per person per day, an increase from the long-term average of 39% then the WiP would be at 'healthy' levels by October 2025:



Figure 5: A projection of Stafford's work-in-progress if efforts to increase productivity to an average of 0.5 decisions per person per day are successful.



This would release capacity to further bring income to the service from non-statutory activity and work more closely with forward planning on enabling the Council's corporate objectives.

## Opportunities

### Objectives

The objectives the team have set themselves by February 2026 are to:

- Communicate better with customers
- Implement a charged-for preapplication advice service that almost every customer wants to use
- Produce options for a new budget for the planning service, including financial and non-financial implications of each option (towards the end of 2025 as next year's budget has already been set) including to bring the DM part of the planning service to as close to cost-neutral for the Council as possible.
- Produce a business case for Cabinet to begin charging an administrative fee for invalid, returned applications
- Make decisions on time
- Make current IT fit-for-purpose
- Communicate clear individual and collective performance metrics
- Get workloads to manageable levels

### Conditions for Success

All successful change projects rely on these components working together:

1. A named person who is fully aware of their responsibility for the project and who owns and leads it.
2. An agreed start and end date.
3. A project charter that sets out clearly and unambiguously the essential information about the project.
4. An assessment of the capacity and skills needed to deliver it and allocating the people and time needed to deliver the capacity and skills needed.
5. A project plan that is understood and followed by everyone involved.
6. A regular, formal report of progress against the project plan.
7. Regular monitoring of the project by the team involved in its work.



8. Regular, formal scrutiny of the project by a board that includes people of authority who are not actively involved in the project.
9. An agreed process to resolve and escalate risks and issues.
10. An agreed process to agree changes to the plan.

The team have a proven toolkit and templates, with guidance notes and training, to set these project components up. But your roles to provide support, challenge and scrutiny are essential. You should expect to see weekly highlight reports that set out clearly and concisely how the improvement project is going. And you should expect to see enough detail of the completed improvement plan, including who the lead officers are, and the timescales intended, to give your support to the work.

## Risks

If the team do not believe that this improvement plan is welcomed by the Council, then the project will likely not begin at the earliest opportunity.

If the Council leadership do not visibly support the vision or objectives that the team have set for themselves, then the improvements will not be delivered.

If the Council agrees the work in the improvement plan but then does not allow for resources to be allocated to it, either by demanding that current service levels and turnaround time continue or not protecting the team from the failure demand that has built up, then the improvements will not be delivered. This could give the perception of a 'battleground' culture will be given further credence, which would demotivate and demoralise the project team from making changes.

If project meetings that manage risks (including reputational risks), issues, priorities, spend against plan, resource allocation and other things that are important to make the improvement project successful don't happen then the project will likely lose pace.

If the planning service cannot prioritise new preapplication advice requests over existing applications (i.e. non-statutory activity over statutory obligations) then the front-loading essential to speeding up planning will not happen quickly enough for it to be valuable to customers, and they may stop making preapplication advice requests.

## Potential for mistakes

It's important to remember that mistakes can still happen. We are human.

When mistakes happen, ask "what can we do to help?" Encourage everyone to report mistakes quickly and transparently. Give opportunities to speak outside formal meetings, so that people can feel more comfortable about reporting mistakes. Encourage everyone to say that they are unsure what to do whenever they are unsure. If we punish people for asking questions or making mistakes, they are likely to conceal problems. That leads to bigger mistakes and failures of trust. People who are unsure what to do and carry on in ignorance are likely to make mistakes too. Being open about mistakes and gaps in understanding encourages learning, builds capability, reduces mistakes, and makes it more likely that we will be successful.





## Conclusion

The Planning Manager and Planning team are committed to making changes happen, in a way that feels different to them than anything that has ever been done before at Stafford. Forward planning and planning enforcement have been involved and engaged with shaping the DM improvement work, to make sure the project is joined up between all the elements of planning.

The team now know what they must do. But doing it will be difficult. Your part in extending trust is crucial. Winning the prize on offer will require your visible commitment to supporting the team's vision and your holding the team accountable with constructive challenge. There may be additional resources required, including extra short-term people, further workshops or training to design and embed new tools and processes or new tools, that the team need to deliver lower long-term costs and higher service levels. Endorse any robust business cases for these short-term investments, champion the team's new approach, and you will make progress towards long-term, lasting improvements.



Vision	Stafford's planning service will be a professionally rewarding place to work with happy, motivated staff. It will deliver a trusted, confident service that turns decisions around quickly, provides reliable pre-application advice on nearly all applications and collaborates well with its customers and stakeholders.		 		Appendix 2		
Purpose	To make places better and sustainable for the future. To manage/enable growth in a strategic manner, allow democracy in decision-making through managing development, and to protect heritage, and ecological assets.						
Area of focus - Customer, Financial, Process, Learning and Growth	Objective	Outcome(s)	Outcome Measure(s)	Activity	Activity Measure(s)	Responsible officer(s)	Activity ref number in improvement plan
customer	communicate better with customers	customers report a greater certainty in the planning process, customers choose to develop in Stafford.	customer satisfaction rating in % of satisfied or very satisfied customers, % increase in number of applications received, number of returning customers	set up a customer satisfaction survey to go out with every decision notice. Implement regular agents forums as part of a communications strategy and content that includes regular 'you said, we did' type reporting	Number of customer satisfaction surveys responded to per month. Communications strategies in place yes/no		2.1 and 4.2
customer							
financial	implement a charged-for preapp service that almost every customer wants to use	income generated / costs recovered for the service, applications are quicker to process	% of applications that have had preapp advice, % of pre-app advice that have progressed to application, average time to determine applications that have had pre-app advice on them in days, income from pre-app advice in £, percentage of applications that have been amended	design a new pre-app approach with collaboration from stakeholders/statutory consultees. Agree prioritisation for pre-app advice work. Create a customer charter that sets out SLAs - especially for mid-application amendments.	Agreed preapp process in place yes/no. Customer charters in place yes/no		3.1, 3.2 and 3.3
financial	produce options for a new budget for the planning service, including financial and non-financial implications of each option.	<i>too late to do now - budget setting is happening - prepare work for 2026 budget setting - will need a wholesale change across the council as the budget holders do not have sight of the budget.</i>					
financial	produce a business case for Cabinet to begin charging an administrative fee for invalid, returned applications	costs are recovered for work that is done to vet/validate an application.	income from returned applications in £, % of applications that are valid on receipt, average time to validate in days	Record the time spent on making invalid applications valid. Measure the number of applications that have stayed as invalid for over X days.	Time recording system is in place yes/no		4.2
internal / process	make decisions on time	decisions are made on time (without EOT?)	average time to determine in days, % of applications determined in 8/13 weeks (without EOT?)	Begin Short Interval Management of caseload - the work of which is likely to include introducing shorter, template reports, template conditions, and getting more timely advice from consultees			2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6
internal / process	make current IT fit-for-purpose	IT enables efficient processes - frequent tasks are quicker to perform. The team own the system, basic changes can be handled from within the service and 'bodes' or extra functionality options can be understood better or changed.	average time to do frequent tasks in minutes/hours, officer hours wasted on downtime	set up time recording system and produce a business case for the time/money that would be saved/generated if IT turned on the functionality that's available in the current version of Uniform (with consultee module switched on, template reports and conditions, and anything else that the current system can be used for that will enable efficiency savings). Make someone responsible for updating conditions once they are in Uniform.	Percentage of decisions that are made using a template report. Number of consultees that have had to be manually contacted per month. Number of conditions used from Uniform per month.		4.2 and 4.5
learning and growth	communicate clear individual and collective performance metrics	staff that are motivated to achieve individual and common goals, progress is made towards achieving targets	% of staff that feel motivated	draw together the outcome and activity measures from this service plan into a performance dashboard. Create a new process for monitoring and managing individual and collective performance.	Number of staff questionnaires responded to. Performance dashboards is in place yes/no.		5.1 and 5.3



learning and growth	get workloads to manageable levels	staff report that their workloads are manageable, Workview shows a workload for the service of around 135 applications in the process of being determined and less than 20 applications in the process of being validated (not including invalid ones that are waiting for information from the applicant), percentage of EOT is reduced	% of staff that feel their workload is manageable, WiP measures in numbers of applications in Workview, percentage of applications that have had an EOT	introduce Short Interval Management of caseload (see row 8 above)	Number of issues logged and number of issues fixed on the issue log per month.		2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6
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## Project Charter

Project name	Planning Improvement Plan		
Created by	Vicki Baggailey, John Holmes	Date	26/03/25
Phone	01785 619327	Email	<a href="mailto:vbaggailey@staffordbc.gov.uk">vbaggailey@staffordbc.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:jholmes@staffordbc.gov.uk">jholmes@staffordbc.gov.uk</a>
Version number	I		

Root cause	The planning team in Development Management (DM) have sustained high workloads for case officers and validation officers which has led to backlogs, slower processing times and lower productivity (decisions per person, per day). This backlog was caused initially by covid and then vacant posts within the case officer teams. The volume of applications received (work in) during that time also increased and the associated delays in determining applications has led to failure demand - frustrations from agents/applicants and lack of confidence from elected members. DM and Forward Planning (planning policy) have also been working in silo which has lengthened processing time for a small number of applications and made each department's work less reliable/robust.
Purpose or goal	To reduce workloads to manageable levels (5 weeks WIP), reintroduce the chargeable pre-app service to lock in higher productivity and higher income, and improve customer, stakeholder and staff satisfaction.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To improve staff wellbeing</li> <li>▪ To improve customer experience</li> <li>▪ To improve reputation</li> <li>▪ To increase income - chargeable pre app service/ validation admin fee</li> <li>▪ To improve efficiency</li> <li>▪ To improve productivity</li> <li>▪ To improve performance, especially drawing together forward planning and DM to make more reliable policies and decisions</li> <li>▪ To reduce reliance on Extension of Time (EOTs)</li> </ul>
Outcomes or benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Better staff wellbeing</li> <li>▪ Better customer experience</li> <li>▪ Better reputation</li> <li>▪ New income</li> <li>▪ Higher efficiency</li> <li>▪ Higher productivity</li> <li>▪ Better performance</li> <li>▪ Reduction in EOTs</li> </ul>



Deliverables or outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A recorded proven methodology to reduce workloads/backlogs</li> <li>▪ A new operational management process</li> <li>▪ Performance reports</li> <li>▪ A log of issues that depress productivity and the agreed actions to fix those issues</li> <li>▪ Financial/budget reports forecasting pre-app income</li> <li>▪ Staff and Customer survey results</li> </ul>	
Timescales	Start date: 1-April-25 End date: 31-Oct-25	
Project performance measures	Starting performance	Target performance
	On hand 476 applications  2.5 week backlog for householder validation and 5 week backlog validation for other applications  3 pre-apps in progress  Staff morale not measured  Customer satisfaction not measured	On hand 135 applications  All applications validated within 2 days  More than 50% of applications have had pre-application advice  Measured and improving staff morale  Measured and improving customer satisfaction
Roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Director: Gregg Stott</li> <li>▪ Sponsor: Dean Piper</li> <li>▪ Project lead: John Holmes</li> <li>▪ Project co-ordinator/administrator Vicki Baggaley</li> <li>▪ Subject matter experts: Sian Wright, Richard Wood and Alex Yendole</li> </ul>	
Communication	The project will prioritise a communications plan early on in the work to give regular, formal feedback of progress.	
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If the resources needed for this project are spent on servicing failure demand, then the work to make changes will not progress.</li> <li>▪ If new pre-application requests are not prioritised over in-progress applications then customers will not purchase them and the new income and higher productivity will not be delivered.</li> </ul>	
Documentation	Highlight reports weekly to the project sponsor, including a snapshot of customer satisfaction, staff morale and Workview charts.  Board reports at the beginning, middle and end of the project including snapshots of the project plan and all project performance measures.	



Connections and dependencies	Dependant on the Planning policy team, senior leadership team and IT making resources available.
Scope	The project will include the work of the DM team including the planning enforcement team and the collective work of the DM and Planning Policy teams.
Decision making process	<p>Decisions regarding the resources required by the DM team will be made by the DM Manager.</p> <p>Decisions regarding the resources required by the Planning Policy team will be made by the Planning Policy Manager.</p> <p>Decisions regarding the Senior Leadership team will be made by the Project Director (escalated to the Chief Executive where required).</p> <p>Any arbitration decisions will be made by the Project Director or Project Sponsor as required.</p>



**Agenda Item 4(b)ii**

# **Stafford Town Centre Regeneration Capital Programme Change**

<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	15 May 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Economic Development and Planning
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Economic Development and Planning Portfolio

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## **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To recommend approval to amend the capital programme to reflect the freehold purchase of 2 sites as set out in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX** as part of the Stafford Town Centre Transformation Programme.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Cabinet agree:
- (a) That the capital programme be updated to reflect the acquisitions of sites as identified on the plans in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX**, funded by the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF).
  - (b) To delegate authority to the Head of Economic Development and Planning in consultation with the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning and the Council Section 151 Officer to take appropriate necessary steps to complete the acquisitions set out in 2.1, (a).
  - (c) To delegate authority to the Head of Economic Development and Planning in consultation with the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning, the Council Section 151 Officer to progress the delivery strategy of the acquired sites. This will include appointment of external contractors, preparation and submission of regulatory approval applications, conducting relevant surveys and entering into any necessary license agreements to deliver the programme as a whole. Where these actions require further consideration reports will be prepared for future Cabinet meetings.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2.2 Following the completion of the acquisition of the Guildhall Shopping Centre and former Co-operative department store during 2024 estimated demolition costs included in the programme were higher than the final awarded contracts. This has meant that there are now funds available to pursue additional acquisitions as part of the programme.
- 2.3 The principle of further acquisition of land and the associated site preparation costs has been discussed and agreed with officers from the Delivery Team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) who have subsequently agreed a further six months to the 'contractual commitment' deadline of September 2025 to enable the Council to fully allocate all of the grant funding.

## **3 Key Issues**

- 3.1 The deadline for securing contractual commitment for the two acquisitions supported by FHSF is September 2025, therefore informal initial conversations have already taken place with the current landowners. Both have indicated their willingness to progress the acquisitions in a suitable timescale, and Heads of Terms are in place, subject to Cabinet approvals.
- 3.2 An associated piece of work that will assess the development potential of all of the land holdings within the regeneration programme (the Investment Prospectus) is nearing completion and will provide analysis of potential next steps in respect of each of the sites.

## **4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The Stafford Town Centre Transformation Programme supports delivery of Priority 1 of the Council's Corporate Plan 2025/6 to 2027/8 by focussing significant public sector investment at the northern end of the town centre. It also delivers against the five Growth Priorities in the Economic Growth Strategy for Stafford Borough 2020-2025.

## **5 Report Detail**

- 5.1 On 26 December 2020 it was announced that Stafford Borough Council had been successful in receiving a provisional funding award of £14,377,723 from the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF). The final award was confirmed and Council approval was sought in February 2021 for inclusion in the capital programme and also to secure the necessary co-funding from the Council.
- 5.2 The Council has committed to transforming the town centre in Stafford and securing ownership of strategic sites is one method of moving regeneration projects forward. These acquisitions form part of the wider regeneration programme which seeks to deliver urban regeneration to Stafford Town Centre. The programme seeks to repurpose the retail area of the Town Centre to

address long-term decline. The objective of the wider intervention is to bring new economic purpose to the Town Centre by delivering highly visible transformational change which will then act as the catalyst for the longer-term revival of the Town Centre.

5.3 Two sites are proposed for acquisition as follows:

Site A: Freehold acquisition funded by FHSF grant

Site B: Freehold acquisition funded by FHSF grant

Each acquisition is supported by an individual business case enclosed within the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX**.

- 5.4 Following acquisition the intention for both sites is to progress demolition in readiness for private sector redevelopment. Demolition both removes potential barriers for investment by creating cleared sites and also reduces the Council's risk of incurring revenue liabilities if the buildings remained in situ and in the Council's ownership.
- 5.5 It should be noted by Cabinet that the rationale for the acquisitions is based on the need for strategic regeneration and transformation of the town centre and creating an investment proposal that will be of sufficient scale to attract the private sector. This rationale is set out in more detail within the business cases.
- 5.6 For the avoidance of doubt, it should be noted that the funding currently available to the Council will only enable preparation works such as demolition. Private sector investment will need to be secured to deliver the redevelopment of the cleared sites.
- 5.7 The existing governance arrangements remain in place whereby the Stafford Town Centre Transformation Programme Board oversee the delivery of the regeneration schemes.
- 5.8 Following the completion of works in both the Market Square and at Station Approach and in tandem with the ongoing partial demolition of the Guildhall Shopping Centre and former Co-op department store, these proposed acquisitions and the associated capital works would utilise the full allocation of the FHSF grant.
- 5.9 Officers will continue to report updates across the programme to Cabinet on a quarterly basis, in addition to any reports within the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.



## 6 Implications

### 6.1 Financial

As set out in the report above, due to the demolition contracts coming in under the estimated amounts included in the programme there is reduced committed spend against the Future High Street Grant. This needs to be in contractual commitment by the end of September 2025. Both of these sites are included within the parameters of the Future High Street programme budget and there is funding available within the grant allocation to support the acquisition and demolition costs as set out in the business case reports in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX**.

The revenue implications are set out in detail within the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX**, however to summarise the revenue cost for empty property rates, insurance and security costs for a period of 5 months are estimated for the two sites at approximately £48,000. Should the demolition be delayed, these costs would continue to be incurred by the Council on an ongoing basis. No assessment has been included of any potential rental income over the period up to demolition but this is considered alongside the need to achieve vacant possession. Any net cost of holding the asset over the period prior to demolition will be met from the budget support reserve.

At present the council has not completed the purchase of the two sites and so purchase costs are based on the current negotiated position with the seller.

### 6.2 Legal

The Stafford Town Centre transformation programme is already identified within the Council's capital programme but Cabinet approval is required to change the use of a previously approved capital expenditure scheme in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules paragraph 4.5.

### 6.3 Human Resources

N/A

### 6.4 Risk Management

The delivery of the Town Centre Regeneration project is identified as a strategic risk on the Council's Strategic Risk Register. There is a risk that the regeneration projects may not deliver as anticipated, to time or to budget, leading to reputational risks to the Council and creating financial risks that impact on the Council's financial position and could impact on service delivery.

A full project risk register has been created for the regeneration programme and this details each individual risk, with appropriate controls and mitigations to manage the risk. Each risk is scored in accordance with the scoring matrix set out in the Council's Risk Management Policy, with a gross and residual risk

score. The risk register is kept under regular review by the project team and significant risks are reported to Leadership team and the Programme Boards.

In relation to this report; there are a number of key risks to be considered:

- (1) Council is unable to secure a development partner for the sites acquired and cleared.

Mitigation: Part of the rationale for acquiring the sites is to use the FHSF award to undertake the site preparation works that impact the viability of a redevelopment scheme if left entirely to the private sector. The Council is progressing the development of an investment prospectus to promote the site opportunity to prospective developers and will undertake market testing before commencing a formal procurement exercise.

- (2) Acquisitions could expose the Council to financial and reputational risks

Mitigation: Business cases have been produced by external specialists to support acquisitions with quantification of costs, risks and benefits.

- (3) Lack of project management could result in delivery risks

Mitigation: External specialist Project management resource procured and supporting the team.

- (4) Lack of governance to ensure oversight of programme delivery, spend and risks

Mitigation: Detailed project planning and the use of robust project management principles will provide a framework for monitoring the programme risks. A detailed risk assessment forms part of the project governance and is actively monitored as part of the wider FHSF programme.

- (5) Risk of unspent monies being repaid to MHCLG. This could occur if the FHSF monies had not been committed within the permitted timescales (September 2025).

Mitigation: Whilst clawback doesn't exist on FHSF monies spent, there is a risk that unspent monies would have to be repaid. As such the Council may have begun work but is then unable to complete the site preparation works necessary to attract private sector investment. The Council could then be liable to fund the remaining works directly. Current projections are set out within the Financial Implications in 6.1 above, however with any project of this scale and nature timescales can be subject to change. The Council's maximum capital exposure for the site preparation works would be just under £1m including contingency.

- (6) Securing planning and other regulatory consents is critical to creating the investment opportunity set out above.

Mitigation: Early dialogue with relevant officers to highlight any policy or technical issues with proposals has taken place and planning and building control colleagues will be engaged throughout the life of the project.

- (7) Unquantified revenue costs associated with the acquisitions

Mitigation: There are revenue implications associated with acquiring the additional properties (Business Rates and insurance liabilities) but as demolition is earmarked in the associated business cases the Council will apply for approval for demolition ahead of detailed planning permission to enable site preparation work to start swiftly, limiting the revenue costs. Insurance colleagues will be supporting the procurement process to ensure that the necessary insurances are in place with relevant contractors.

- (8) Subsidy control risk

Mitigation: The Council's position in terms of Subsidy Control based on professional advice is set out in **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX 2**.

## **6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

N/A

## **6.6 Health**

It is recognised that a redevelopment of this scale will have significant impacts on many of the wider determinants of health and the Project Delivery Team will work with colleagues and partners to ensure opportunities to reduce health inequalities are maximised.

## **6.7 Climate Change**

Climate change and sustainability will be considered as part of the redevelopment work associated with this project.

## **7 Appendices**

Appendix 1 and 2: **CONFIDENTIAL**

## **8 Previous Consideration**

Council - 23 February 2021 - Minute No C100/21

Cabinet - 5 October 2023 - Minute No CAB26/23

Cabinet- 7 December 2023 - Minute CAB43/23

## 9 Background Papers

None

<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Michelle Smith
<b>Telephone Number:</b>	01785 619335
<b>Ward Interest:</b>	Forebridge
<b>Report Track:</b>	Cabinet 15 May 2025 (Only)
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes