

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

Foreword from the Leader:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Councillor Aidan T.A. Godfrey

Leader of the Council

Our Vision:

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

Priorities:

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

Our priorities are:

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

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

Context:

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

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

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

Core Principles/How we will deliver:

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

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

Partnership Working:

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

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

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

Profile of the Borough Council:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Priority 1 - Prosperous Economy

Why this is important:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

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

How we will deliver this:

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

How we will measure our performance:

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

Priority 2 - Communities and Wellbeing

Why this is important:

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

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

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

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

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

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

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

How we will deliver this:

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

How we will measure our performance:

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

Priority 3 - Climate Change, Nature Recovery and the Environment

Why this is important:

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

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

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

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

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

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

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

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

How we will deliver this:

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

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

How we will measure our performance:

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

Priority 4: Effective Council

Why this is important:

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

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

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

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

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

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

What we want to achieve (our objectives):

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

How we will deliver this:

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

How we will measure our performance:

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

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