



Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Governance Statement 2024/25

1. Introduction

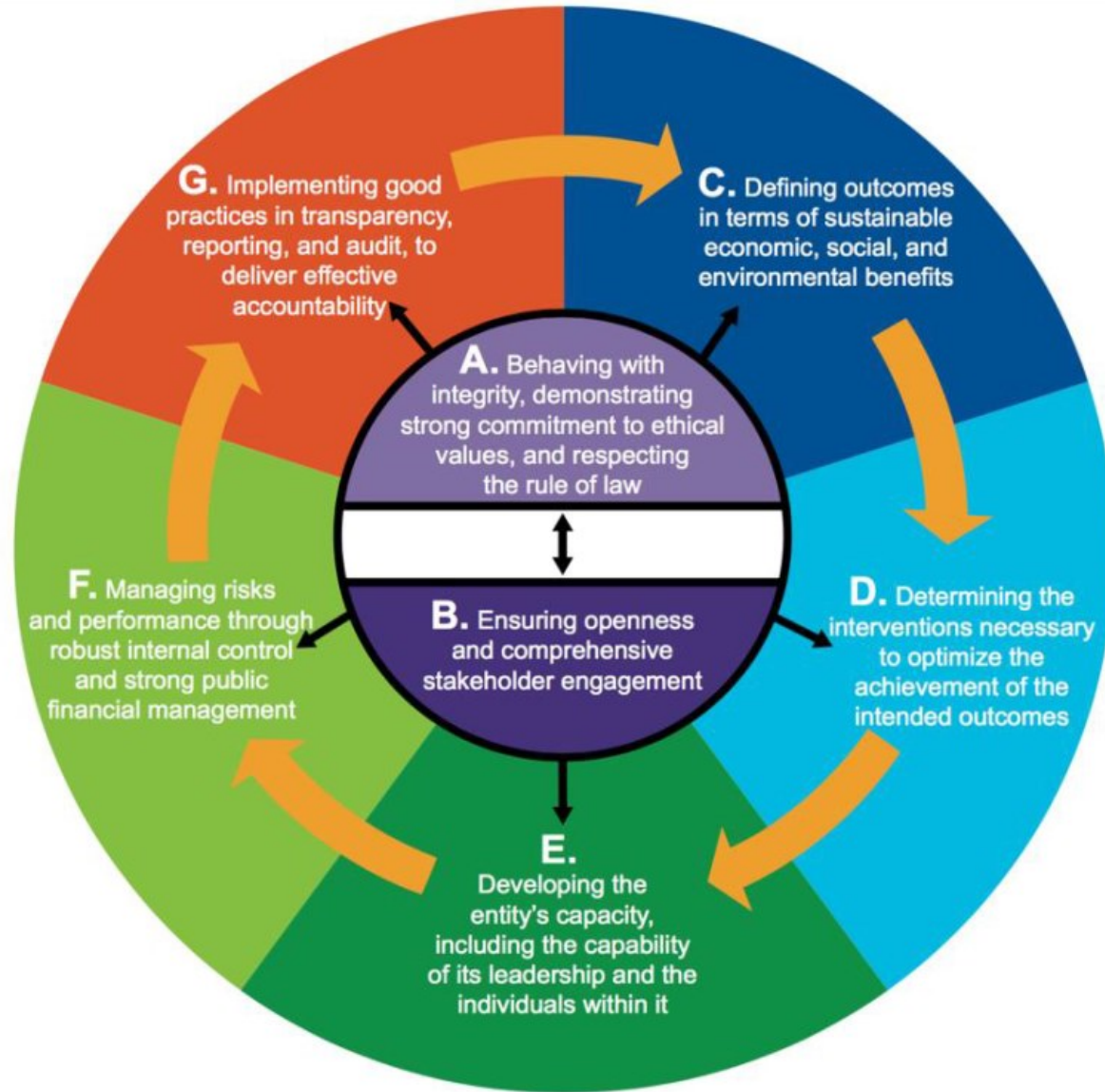
- 1.1 Each year the city council produces a governance statement that explains how it makes decisions, manages its resources and promotes values and high standards of conduct and behaviour. This statement complies with regulation 6(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 1.2 Stoke-on-Trent City Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded, correctly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively to deliver quality services to the community it serves.
- 1.3 The city council is committed to embedding and achieving a robust set of corporate governance arrangements. The city council is managed within a robust framework as set out in the city council constitution, which clearly outlines how the city council operates, how decisions are made and what procedures need to be followed to ensure the city council is efficient, transparent and accountable to its local residents and stakeholders.
- 1.4 The Annual Governance Statement reports on:
 - i. how the city council complies with its own governance arrangements;
 - ii. how the city council monitors the effectiveness of the governance arrangements and;
 - iii. what improvements or changes in governance arrangements are proposed during the forthcoming year.
- 1.6 The governance framework is under continuous review and this has continued this year. The Monitoring Officer remains a member of Senior Management Team (SMT), corporate groups and is fully involved in the breadth of city council activity and decision making. A full constitutional review has been completed and the next full review of the constitution will take place in 3 years' time, until then amendments will be made on a frequent basis as constitutional updates.
- 1.7 The footnotes provided are internet links which will take you to the specific supporting documents and appropriate web pages.

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2. Scope of Responsibility

- 2.1 Stoke-on-Trent City Council is responsible for ensuring that its services are provided and conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Local Government Act 1999 also places a duty on all councils to secure continuous improvement and to demonstrate economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 2.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the city council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and arrangements for the management of risk.
- 2.3 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) identified seven key principles relating to governance in their document *International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2016a)*. A summary of the Seven Principles of Good Governance in the public sector and how they relate to each other is shown over:

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International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2016) (the 'International Framework')

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The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.4 The Governance Framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which Stoke-on-Trent City Council is directed and controlled. This, together with its activities and leadership, enables it to monitor and manage its performance for delivering cost effective services.
- 2.5 Effective performance and risk management allows the city council to have increased confidence in achieving its objectives and also allows the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent to have increased assurance in the city council's governance arrangements and its ability to deliver.
- 2.6 The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to an acceptable level. Risk cannot be eliminated and therefore controls can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. Internal control is based on a process to:
- Identify and prioritise risks that prevent the achievement of the city council aims and objectives;
 - Evaluate the likelihood that risks are realised and their impact;
 - Appropriately manage identified risks.
- 2.7 The city council has a number of committees that challenge and review the options considered and actions taken by the city council. The aim is to ensure that robust decisions are made that focus on achieving the best strategic outcomes for local residents within the available level of resources.
- 2.8 The city council has an Audit and Standards Committee,¹ which, has as part of its function the responsibility of considering the effectiveness of the city council's risk management arrangements, the control environment and associated anti-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements, and seeks assurance that action is being taken on issues identified by auditors and inspectors. In discharging this function, the Audit and Standards Committee will ensure compliance with such codes, protocols, statements and policies as are necessary to meet its responsibilities, which includes the appropriate arrangements for the management of risk.

¹ [Audit and Standards Committee Details](#)

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3. The 2023/24 Governance Framework

- 3.1 The CIPFA/IFAC framework (Good Governance in the Public Sector), provides advice and indicators to good governance which affords the city council the opportunity to review and test its governance and structures in delivering best practice.
- 3.2 The CIPFA/IFAC framework identifies the seven core principles of good governance as:
1. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
 2. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
 3. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.
 4. Determining the interventions necessary to optimize the achievement of the intended outcomes.
 5. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
 6. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
 7. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.
- 3.3 The governance framework covered by this statement has been in place at Stoke-on-Trent City Council for the year ended 31 March 2025 and is considered up to June 2025. An assessment of the city council's governance arrangements against each core principle is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.4 In April 2024 Cabinet approved the new Our City Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy for 2024-28, which was approved by full council in May. Our City, Our Wellbeing is a very different strategy to its predecessor, and represents a significant change of approach which is based around a fundamentally different relationship between the city council and our residents. It is about serving, supporting and enabling our citizens and communities, and responding to the genuine needs of residents of all ages in more effective and financially sustainable ways. The Corporate Strategy is a blueprint for transformation in the way that local government works – it makes the case for adopting new ways of working and of thinking about our core purpose and objectives. The Cabinet also approved a new Planning and Performance Framework which sets out arrangements for corporate monitoring and reporting of performance against these objectives and priorities.
- 3.5 The Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy replaces the Stronger Together Strategic Vision and sets out seven core priorities: Healthier, Wealthier, Fairer, Cleaner, Greener, Safer, and Skilled. It also focuses on five cross-cutting themes which relate to partnership working to solve complex problems which affect population wellbeing: Supporting Family Life, Reclaiming our Streets, Addressing Hardship and Poverty, Ensuring Decent Homes for All, and Supporting People to Live Independently. Future governance statements will reflect the strategic aims and priorities contained in the Corporate Strategy.

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- 3.6 The Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy focuses on five cross-cutting themes which relate to partnership working to solve complex problems which affect population wellbeing:
- Supporting family life: ensuring families are helping to give their children the best start in life.
 - Reclaiming our streets: enabling residents to take back ownership of our streets and public spaces.
 - Addressing hardship and poverty: helping to maximise income and improve residents' quality of life.
 - Ensuring decent homes for all: using our influence to help eradicate problems such as fuel poverty, damp and mould.
 - Supporting people to live independently: working with partners to improve support and accommodation.
- 3.7 The city council continues to operate in a very uncertain and challenging economic environment which is placing significant pressure on its financial position. The current economic climate brings with it elevated levels of uncertainty and volatility at a macro level that increase the level of financial risk to all local authorities and wider public sector organisations. The city council continues to experience significant demand and inflationary pressures as a result of this. Due to the particular challenges faced by the city council including the low levels of financial resilience and reserves, high demand for social care and a weak council tax base, this presents a greater financial risk than it does to those authorities that do not experience similar characteristics.
- 3.8 The city council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/25 was approved by City Council on 5th March 2024. As set out in the MTFS Section 25 statement the S151 Officer indicated that "the Council has reached an unsustainable financial position driven by demand and cost pressures in relation to Children's Social Care coupled with a weak council tax base and historically low levels of reserves. Setting a balanced budget has only been possible through the request for Exceptional Financial Support. The seriousness of the Council's financial position cannot be understated. In the absence of Exceptional Financial Support, a Section 114 Notice in relation to 2024-25 due to the forecast overspend in 2023-24, forecast pressures for 2024-25 and the consequential impact on the levels of General Fund Reserve, would have to be contemplated and almost certainly issued."
- 3.9 The receipt of Exceptional Financial Support has enabled this position to be addressed in the short term and allowed a balanced budget to be set for the 2024/25 financial year. In accepting this Exceptional Financial Support, the city council was given the ability to address the current funding shortfall through the use of temporary borrowing and/or the application of capital receipts to address the relevant revenue pressures. Whilst, this presents an adequate position in the short term as it enables the immediate financial challenges to be addressed, this also depletes the available capital resources available to the city council to invest in future years.
- 3.10 The request for Exceptional Financial Support was coupled with a credible resource and early intervention plan which aims to reduce costs in relation to Children's Social Care over a 4-year period. Delivery against this plan will be critical in ensuring that the city council can set a balanced budget in future years and address the current financial challenges. Due to the unprecedented number, complexity, and costs of children requiring our support, failure to deliver against this plan would mean the city council would find it extremely difficult to set a balanced budget in future years and the position relating to a potential S114 notice will need to be kept under continual review.

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- 3.11 With the use of the Exceptional Financial Support, the Council was able to outturn against budget in 2024/25, and achieved compliance with the target against the first year of the four year recovery plan. This provided confidence to Government to provide access to further Exceptional Financial Support for 2025/26 which enabled the City council to set a balanced budget again.
- 3.12 Nevertheless, the city council faces a significant financial gap in 2026-27 and beyond. It is therefore critical that work continues on developing and delivering further transformation, saving and budget reduction options. Whilst the key challenge relates to reducing the cost of Children's Social Care, it will be critical that the city council considers options to reduce costs across all service areas. This is also likely to require ongoing dialogue with government regarding these challenges. The scale of the budget reductions required and the difficult decisions the city council now faces should not be underestimated and the city council will need to work at pace taking early decisions on how costs will be further reduced to ensure it meets its legal obligation to set a budget. Due to the unprecedented levels of demand faced should further funding support or national funding reform not take place and if the council are unable to transform services and deliver savings at the pace required the risk of a Section 114 notice being issued in future years remains a possibility, although the council considers the risk of issuing a Section 114 notice in the near future, i.e. in-year in 2025/26, to be low.
- 3.14 As stated, Stoke-on-Trent City Council was one of a number of local authorities to request Exceptional Financial Support for the financial year 2024-25. The government agreed to the support, conditional on an external assurance review by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) which was undertaken in September 2024. This follows previous review work undertaken by CIPFA in December 2023 which was proactively requested by the city council on financial management and financial resilience. The purpose of this was to gain independent assurance that the city council's finances were not only well-managed, but that the city council had taken, or was taking, all necessary measures to be expected given the financial challenge it faces. The CIPFA reviews concluded that whilst there were operational improvements that could be made, that these were minor in nature and overall, the city council has robust financial management in place, has taken, or is taking all material steps to manage emerging pressures where possible and the core driver to its challenging position was indeed the rising cost and demand in Children's Social Care. The CIPFA review in September 2024 highlighted the further progress made following the December 2023 review. As part of the city council's request for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from government, the city council produced a credible resource plan that looks to reduce costs and demand within Children's Social Care over the coming 4-year period through investment in early intervention and early help. The core elements of the funding will be used to drive down demand for children's services and thus future costs, including £24 million to support social care placements and £11.2 million to support investment in Early Help Intervention.

4. Review of Effectiveness

- 4.1 A review of the city council's governance arrangements draws on several sources including:
- Service updates from individual service managers
 - Reviews of partnership governance arrangements

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- External inspections by government agencies
- Internal Audit reviews which consider and report upon compliance with corporate policies and procedures
- External audit reports

- 4.2 The Audit and Standards Committee plays a key role in the city council's review of the effectiveness of its governance framework. It seeks assurance on the adequacy of the city council's risk management, control and governance arrangements.
- 4.3 The Audit and Standards Committee receives regular training to ensure it has the appropriate knowledge and skills and undertook the core knowledge and skills questionnaire from CIPFA guidance with the results being built into training plans for the Committee. The Committee also completes a self-assessment against updated CIPFA guidance. The latest self-assessment was undertaken in January 2024. This demonstrated the Committee fully complies in over 77% of all areas, with a total score of 170 out of a possible 200. An action plan has been put into place to address areas for improvement.

Internal Audit and Review

- 4.4 The city council has a strong internal audit function and a positive working relationship with external audit. The arrangements for the provision of internal audit are contained within the city council's Financial Regulations which are included within the Constitution. The Corporate Director of Resources, as Section 151 Officer is responsible for ensuring that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the city council's accounting and other systems of internal control, as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 4.5 In 2017 CIPFA published revised Public Sector Internal Audit Standards to promote further improvement in the professionalism, quality, consistency and effectiveness of internal audit across the public sector. The city council has adopted these standards and internal audit has carried out self-assessments with areas for improvement being addressed. An external review was undertaken in November 2022. This gave the city council's internal audit service the highest category of "Generally Conforms" to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and those of the Local Government Application Note for the second time. An action plan has been produced to implement the recommendations and suggestions from the review, which are reported to the Audit and Standards Committee on a regular basis.
- 4.6 Internal Audit's Annual Plan is prioritised by a combination of key and statutory systems' assessments and reviews on the basis of risk, and the city council's corporate governance arrangements. The work incorporates reviews of the main financial systems, other systems identified as high risk, grant certification work and the continued development of proactive fraud work. The resulting work plan is discussed and agreed with Corporate Directors, the Audit and Standards Committee and shared with the city council's external auditor. All planned audit reports include an assessment of the adequacy of internal control and a prioritised action plan to address any areas needing improvement where for example, controls need to be improved or the overall control environment strengthened.

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These are provided to Corporate Directors, and other officers as appropriate, and a summary is provided to Members on a quarterly basis.

- 4.7 The internal audit review of the city council's control environment is set out in the annual report to Audit and Standards Committee which concluded that based on the full knowledge of the Chief Internal Auditor, including significant risks the city council is facing and information from a variety of other assurance sources, the level of assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the city council's control environment is Satisfactory. This includes an assessment of the level of assurance the city council's governance arrangements can provide. A number of governance audits were completed or in progress in 2024/25 including the Stoke-on-Trent safeguarding children partnership, management of budgets and a risk management health check review.
- 4.8 Whilst a Satisfactory opinion on the control environment as a whole is positive, individual audit reviews have highlighted a number of opportunities to improve control further which are to be addressed through the implementation of internal audit recommendations. In addition, the city council plans to continue its Financial Assurance programme of work to systematically review and strengthen, where necessary, existing controls and processes to ensure consistent and robust application at all levels.

External Audit and Review

- 4.9 Mazars LLP have been appointed by the Public Sector Auditor Appointments (PSAA²) as the city council's external auditor from 2023/24 for a five year period. Their annual work programme is set in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office and includes nationally prescribed and locally determined activities. City council officers work closely with external audit to provide information and assurance in support of those conclusions and acts on any recommendations made as a result.
- 4.10 In November 2024, the city council's external auditors issued a completion report for the financial years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. Statutory Instrument (2024) No. 907 - "The Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2024" imposed a backstop date of 13 December 2024 by which date external auditors were required to issue their opinions on any financial statements prior to 2023/24 that remain outstanding. The time constraints imposed by the backstop date meant that the city council's previous external auditors, Ernst Young, were unable to complete all necessary procedures to obtain sufficient, appropriate audit evidence to support their opinions and therefore issued disclaimed audit reports for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. The external auditors did not identify any audit differences, either adjusted or unadjusted, as part of their audits. In addition, the external auditors also issued a Value for Money report covering 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23. The report did not provide an opinion but have highlighted two key areas of concern, the "inadequate" Ofsted conclusion relating to Children's Social Care that was issued in 2019 and the financial challenges facing the city council. Updates on these areas are included in the paragraphs below.

² PSAA website provides information regarding the National Audit Office Code of Practice in relation to audits of local authorities

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External Inspections

- 4.11 The city council is subject to a number of inspections by regulatory bodies on many of the services that it provides. During 2023/24 the following inspections were undertaken:
- 4.12 Over the last 2 years Adult Social Care and All Age Commissioning has been preparing for and delivering on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance of how we deliver our Care Act duties in Stoke-On-Trent. This was the first CQC local authority assurance process for over a decade and culminated in a report that went live on 13th June 2025 with an outcome rating of Good. The report concluded “Provision of adult social care was a clear priority within Stoke-on-Trent, and there was a positive energy amongst staff and members to do the best for people and make Stoke-on-Trent a great place to live and work. There was an open culture that embraced challenges and supported people to take risks and try new things. There were clear and accountable leadership and governance arrangements, and everyone knew what was happening across adult social care and were pulling in the same direction to support people in the community.”
- 4.13 The assessment focussed on four key themes – “Working With People”, “Providing Support”, “How the Local Authority Ensures Safety Within the System” and “Leadership”. These were assessed against 9 quality statements under the four headings, with each being scored from 1 (inadequate) to 4 (outstanding). Across the scoring, no service area in Stoke-on-Trent received a 1, with the majority scoring 3 (good). In their report, the CQC inspectors highlighted several key factors. They said that people’s feedback to the Care Act assessment was positive, and carers said they received good early intervention and support. People had access to information and advice in their communities through the city council’s Community Lounges service, which were valued, inspectors said. Meanwhile, people had a good experience of discharge from hospital and felt supported - and people who used services said they felt safe and felt that the safeguarding process had met their preferred outcomes.
- 4.14 The report has been reviewed and areas identified by CQC as requiring improvement have been included alongside Cabinet Priorities and areas identified within the Self-Assessment as necessary for improvement in the 2025/26 Adult Social Care Improvement Plan that reports to the Adults Improvement Board (AIB). A new Quality and Compliance Team has been established to facilitate the AIB and the improvement plan and to continue to maintain preparedness for assurance.
- 4.15 The city council has 5 internal services registered with Care Quality Commission (CQC), these are:
- The Meadows – Last Inspection Aug 2019 – CQC Rating Good latest PIR review October 2024
 - Marrow House – Last inspection Aug 2019 – CQC Rating Good latest PIR (Performance Information Request) review July 2024
 - Enablement service – Last inspection June 2018 – CQC Rating Good latest PIR review July 2024
 - School Street – Last inspection Nov 2017 – CQC Rating Good latest PIR review October 2024
 - Shared Lives – no inspection has taken place since registration in May 2019 therefore no rating, however last PIR reviewed October 2024

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- 4.16 CQC have continued to monitor regulated activity remotely where possible and monitor data regularly to inform where they need to re-assess a service's rating. All services are required to return a provider information request (PIR) with key information aligned to the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE's) to allow them to make an informed decision on whether services require further inspection. All internal services have submitted PIR's as requested and the CQC have taken no further action based on the information submitted and ratings remain the same where rated.
- 4.17 The CQC reviewed data relating to all of the above services during 2024 and highlighted no action is required in relation to forthcoming inspections or change to ratings.
- 4.18 In October 2022 Ofsted undertook a full inspection of our children's social care services (ILACS). The review looked at the impact of leaders on social work practice; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; and children in care and care leavers. The results of the review were an overall effectiveness score of 'requires improvement to be good', with the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers rated 'good'.
- 4.19 The inspection report recognised the "substantial" and "significant" progress that the city council has made since the 2019 inspection, and identified a "coordinated and relentless drive to continue to improve children's experiences". Since the inspection, the city council have refreshed its continuous improvement plan to ensure it has a comprehensive plan to respond to all inspection feedback. This improvement plan has been formally submitted to Ofsted and is being delivered through a robust project management approach.
- 4.20 In October 2023, Ofsted undertook a Focussed Visit which looked at the local authority's arrangements for planning and achieving permanence for children up to the age of 10 years. This Inspection identified that senior leaders had maintained a focus on improvement and as a result, more children are achieving security and stability through permanence at home with their parents, with connected or foster carers or through adoption. Ofsted identified that senior leaders have an accurate understanding of strengths of the service and areas requiring further development. Challenges with recruitment and retention were identified but noted to be subject to proactive intervention. Improvements in the quality of management oversight and provision of life story work were identified.
- 4.21 The city council have had two six month reviews with the Department for Education and the Children's Commissioner to review the children's social care improvement journey. In March 2023 the review recognised the significant achievement of the ILACS outcome, the holistic nature of the Improvement Plan and a strong partnership commitment to working together. It noted further development of the strategic partnership infrastructure is required. The review recognised ongoing social worker recruitment and retention challenges and high numbers of children in care with an increasing trajectory. The need to progress identified Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) priorities ahead of inspection was identified. The review in October 2023 saw the DfE Commissioner identify multiple strengths and improvements, but which due to the financial position of the LA proposed that whilst the role of the DfE Commissioner should end, the Statutory Direction should remain with support from an experienced Improvement Advisor. The Improvement Advisor has chaired the Improvement Board subsequently on a 6 weekly basis.

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- 4.22 In March 2024, the city council took part in the West Midlands children's services peer challenge, where the city council were paired with an outstanding regional local authority to review our services and share learning, and the city council have made changes in response to feedback at this event. The DCS (Director of Children's Services) network also agreed annual shared priorities as a result of this event. The city council have continued to utilise DfE funding to innovate and extend the reach of impactful services; Family Group Conferencing and multi-agency edge of care approaches (Catalyst) have added value. A PAUSE Project is now operational and Lifelong Links work has been added to the remit of the Family Group Conference service. A Local Government Association children's resources Peer Challenge was commissioned in August 2023. This confirmed that the city council's strategic plans, including investment in early intervention, were an appropriate course of action.
- 4.23 In May 2025, Ofsted undertook a further full inspection of children's social care services. The result of this review will be reported to the city council in July 2025.
- 4.24 The city council's youth justice service was inspected in September 2022 which gave an overall rating of 'requires improvement'. The city council has used the recommendations to inform improvement activity which is overseen by the Youth Justice Management Board. The city council's small group homes are regularly inspected with the majority currently rated as 'good' and two are graded as requires improvement. Registered managers of the homes prepare action plans in response to inspection feedback and these action plans are progressed and monitored.
- 4.25 In September 2022 the city council had an Ofsted monitoring visit of adult and community learning following the previous 'Inadequate' judgement following the inspection visit in 2019, and the 'Requires Improvement' judgement in September 2021. That monitoring visit report reflected the focussed improvements made in respect of the recommendations made. In 2022-23 the Post 16 Learning service sat within two directorates and had two senior leadership teams. The Children and Family Services (CAFS) directorate continued to be responsible for the Funding Quality and Compliance team while the Housing Development and Growth directorate managed the delivery teams. As part of the improvement plan the two parts have been brought together and now wholly sit within CAFS.
- 4.23 In July 2023 Ofsted conducted a 3-day full inspection and graded the service 'Good' in all 7 areas. The report recognised the enormous progress made by the service since the last report and the improvements made within the service. There has been evidenced consistent improvement over the last 4 years that have been reflective of our achievement, attendance and retention rates. Following on from the full inspection we have reviewed our Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) taking into consideration the areas in which Ofsted mentioned as areas for improvement. These are:
- Leaders should ensure that the starting points of all learners and apprentices are used to plan learning, ensuring that all learners and apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.

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- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices are supported to act on the feedback they receive so that the quality of their work improves over time.
- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices are set challenging targets which support them to achieve their best.

The city council are currently reshaping its adult and community learning provision and are focussed on continuing the improvement journey through close monitoring and governance processes including refreshed board structures.

- 4.24 In January 2024 Ofsted and CQC undertook a joint area inspection of SEND and Alternative Provision (AP). The outcome was outcome 2 which states that outcomes are inconsistent for children and young people in the City. Nevertheless, inspectors recognised the improvement work that had been undertaken as the right things to do but had not yet consistently demonstrated impact as they were relatively recent developments. The areas for improvement are:
- The local partnership should further improve the timeliness of the identification, assessment, and implementation of support to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.
 - The local partnership should continue to work to improve the visibility and engagement of children and young people with SEND within their communities while in education and their broader life experiences
 - The local partnership should continue to work to develop the timeliness and quality of EHC (Education Health Care) plans so they always accurately identify needs and clearly articulate the provision needed for the child and young person.
 - The local partnership should continue to develop its systems and processes to ensure that the voice of children and young people with SEND is heard and acted upon at an individual and strategic level.
 - The local partnership should continue to improve the oversight of children and young people attending and quality assurance of alternative provisions and out-of-county placements, including residential settings.
- 4.25 The directorate in partnership with health colleagues have responded to the actions through a refreshed improvement plan. Underneath the SEND Delivery Group there will be five workstreams under each of the five SEND Strategy priorities. All of the areas identified for improvement through the inspection sit under a priority area. The workstreams are responsible for the action and activity, collating the evidence of progress and impact and reporting this into the SEND Delivery Group.
- 4.26 There is a collective commitment across our partnerships for a restorative based approach to working with our children, families and communities, and also with each other. This will be evident in the way we challenge and support each other, doing 'with', not 'to', repairing and restoring relationships, holding each other to account, and working to a shared vision and outcomes. It represents a value base that will drive improvements in professional practice and ensure that we hear and act on the voice of our children and young people. To this end, our Executive Board for SEND and Inclusion is co-chaired by our Chief Executive and the Chief Executive of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB (Integrated Care Board), providing executive oversight and leading together on the development and delivery of our current inclusion strategy. Our revised governance model for education provides opportunities for engagement with partners at all levels, and we continue to work closely with our schools to embed the graduated approach. Alongside this, a number of NHS Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS (Integrated Care System) Programme Boards drive forward partnership

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working and ownership in areas such as mental health, children and young people and learning disability and autism, allowing for a whole system view.

- 4.27 The city council has a permanent children and families directorate leadership team in place. Oversight of the delivery of the SEND and AP improvement plan is owned by the Stoke-on-Trent Executive Board for SEND and Inclusion. This Board will regularly review progress against this plan, monitoring progress and responding to barriers or areas of concern, as well as tracking financial and performance targets. The Board will stay alert to sector developments and changes in our children's services and respond accordingly in adapting this plan.
- 4.28 Progress will be reported regularly to Cabinet Members Briefing (CMB) so that our councillors are well-sighted on delivery and any risks and issues and can support and challenge as appropriate. The Children's Improvement Board will also scrutinise progress as part of our continued improvement journey, and act as a key forum to engage partners on shared actions. The improvement plan will be refreshed annually.
- 4.29 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 was enacted in July 2023, with the Regulator of Social Housing subsequently launching their new Consumer Standards and inspection approach in February 2024. Inspections will take place on a four-yearly cycle, with six weeks' notice being given prior to a planned inspection in most instances. Introductory meetings have taken place with the Regulator, to meet our Regulatory contacts. Stoke-on-Trent City Council has not yet been notified for inspection.
- 4.30 In preparation for the new regulatory regime, the Housing Division have undertaken a self-assessment against the Consumer Standards, which is being continually kept up to date. This has been supplemented by an external review by the Housing Quality Network (HQN) in Autumn 2023, with their findings forming the basis of the Housing Transformation and Service Improvement plan, which is being implemented by the Regulatory & Strategic Services team. Sub-groups focus on maintaining compliance with each of the four Consumer Standards (Neighbourhood & Community, Safety & Quality, Tenancy, and Transparency, Influence & Accountability). Governance arrangements are in place to monitor our compliance position and overall preparation for inspection through the Housing Management Meeting, Housing Board and a six-monthly compliance report to Cabinet.
- 4.31 A decision was made to insource the city council's repairs and maintenance service and to close the wholly owned company 'Unitas' on 31 March 2025. The governance arrangements will align with the Housing Management Services detailed in 4.30 above and a Quality Assurance Plan has been developed and will be monitored in line with existing formal procedures. The repairs and maintenance service transitioned successfully in line with the plan on 1 April 2025.
- 4.32 The outcome of the city council's assessment of its governance arrangements in 2023/24 is summarised below. A more detailed assessment against the seven CIPFA/IFAC principles is set out in **Appendix 1**.

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5. Framework – key improvement areas

5.1 The following paragraphs detail key elements of the framework which have undergone significant improvements and further developments are planned over the coming year.

Organisational Framework

5.2 The Organisational Framework is designed to ensure that every team across the organisation is always focused on what it needs to do to improve outcomes for residents, and that service teams have the confidence to develop and transform their services, work to meet this requirement. To be able to do this with confidence, the city council also requires a clear system of accountability that ensures priorities are being delivered and money is being spent wisely. The Organisational Framework is intended to provide a system of development and assurance that should give Members confidence that the city council is performing at a high level. The aim is to create a 'one council' ethos and culture that starts to break down departmental and divisional boundaries, to enable and encourage teamwork across different directorates and services where that is likely to be the most effective approach to improving outcomes.

5.3 There are five key elements of the Organisational Framework:

1. **Operating Plan** - The annual Operating Plan for 2024/25 has been drafted and was approved by Cabinet in May. It translates the Corporate Strategy into priorities for delivery and improvement, setting out the allocation of resources in line with the budget, key performance measures, efficiency and productivity requirements, identified key risks and mitigations and details of key enablers of continuous improvement.
2. **Performance Management** - Delivery of the Corporate Strategy will be underpinned by a set of carefully chosen performance indicators which will be closely aligned to the priorities and objectives set out in the strategic plan and operating plan.
3. **Assurance Model** - A system of assurance based around the core responsibilities of managers. The purpose of this system is to ensure rapid escalation and early support to managers and teams that need support.
4. **Governance for Delivery** - A single governance framework that respects the city council's status as a Member-led authority and accords with a single accountability framework.
5. **Organisational Development** - Enabling functions to ensure that the organisation becomes more integrated, with different teams working together in pursuit of common goals.

5.4 The Corporate Strategy also introduced a new set of corporate values for the organisation and its staff to uphold and demonstrate at all times:

- Empowerment: enabling communities to help improve their own lives and places.
- Openness: sharing the ideas and information needed to solve key challenges.
- Empathy: caring about our residents and how we can best serve them.
- Partnership: pooling energy and expertise to tackle important challenges.

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- Stewardship: taking ownership of our responsibilities to residents and businesses.
- Representation: championing our city and fostering civic pride.

- 5.5 The 2024/25 Operating Plan included a focus on achieving an organisational and cultural shift to facilitate the transition away from the traditional approach of 'doing to' and 'delivery' towards more 'doing with' and 'enabling'. This approach entails a greater emphasis on partnership working, collaboration, co-design and the establishment of empowered, influential networks around thematic issues and complex problems affecting the city and its residents, businesses and communities. This cultural shift towards becoming a more outward-facing, collaborative organisation is reflected in the new corporate values. The Plan set out proposals to invest in workforce development to equip staff with the skills needed to embrace new ways of working; recruitment and retention; increased use of digital functionality to release more resources for the delivery of essential services, and effective use of city council property and assets to leverage improved outcomes for residents and communities.
- 5.6 The Operating Plan also focused on the need for transformation in the way that some frontline services operate in order to deliver improved outcomes and to achieve greater financial sustainability. Working with our partners, including voluntary, community and faith organisations, the city council sought to invest in early support services, getting alongside people in their communities, giving them the tools to deal with the challenges they face. The city council set out to adopt the perspective of understanding the strengths of people and communities, rather than just seeing their needs, and aimed to give some of its powers and resources away to strengthen community development work and build greater resilience in disadvantaged neighbourhoods throughout the city.
- 5.7 The Operating Plan described the nature and scale of the financial challenges facing the city council due to the impact of national funding reductions, rapidly increasing levels of demand for services such as social care, and low levels of financial resilience due to a relatively weak council tax base. It set out a plan to use £42.2 million of Exceptional Financial Support from the Government over two years to invest in developing and delivering more preventative approaches to front line service delivery, including a credible resource plan that looked to reduce costs and demand within Children's Social Care over a four-year period through investment in early intervention and early help. The city council's plan was to repay this borrowing over the medium-term using its pipeline of capital receipts, generated through the disposal of land and property assets.
- 5.8 The Operating Plan also detailed further steps towards delivering the city council's transformation and change management programme, with key projects including:
- Transforming Procurement – Creating a sustainable operating model for procurement services while reducing potential risks to the city council.
 - The Hub Implementation – Expanding the development of a one-stop intranet site.
 - SAP Insight – Delivering integrated business systems across HR, Finance and Payroll services to improve handling of transactions and service management data.
 - Public Protection Transformation – increasing capacity to tackle local and statutory priorities more effectively.

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- Digital – New service management systems, websites and online transactions.
- Leisure and Wellbeing Transformation – Transitioning to a community-focused leisure service which supports sport and rehabilitation opportunities to help improve health outcomes.
- Family Support – Joint working with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to provide early help for families who need support in order to prevent vulnerable children being taken into care.
- Children and Family Services Transformation - aimed at helping to reduce the number of children who need to be taken into local authority care.
- A programme of work to increase the financial sustainability of Adult Social Care services by reducing levels of demand through effective preventative approaches.
- Housing Transformation Programme – this includes a concerted focus on damp and mould problems in the city’s housing stock.

5.9 During 2024/25 the city council approved a suite of strategies designed to support delivery and priorities. These included:

- Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy (2024-28)
- Corporate Parenting Strategy (2024-27)
- SEND Strategy (2024-2028)
- Youth Justice Plan (2024/25)
- Stoke-on-Trent Economic Development Strategy - Developing a Wellbeing Economy: Sustainable, Inclusive Growth for Everyone
- Staffordshire & Stoke-On-Trent COP Charter
- Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025/26
- Joint Strategic Transport Statement
- Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Investment Programme 2025/26

Collectively, these strategies will help the city council to improve outcomes across a range of services and priorities and achieve its strategic priorities for the organisation and the wider city.

Team Plans

5.10 In April 2024 team plans were finalised that focused on continuous improvement and driving efficiency. The Team Plans are designed to encourage managers and teams to consider how they contribute to corporate priorities, and where there may be scope to work differently in future to help strengthen collaboration and partnership working to improve outcomes for our residents. Team Plans are a critically important element of the Organisational Framework. They reinforce the ‘golden thread’ linking priorities and outcomes in the Corporate Strategy with all levels of business planning across the organisation. The process for developing team plans for the

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2024/25 Financial Year started early in the new calendar year, and was refreshed and updated to ensure that plans focused on the new corporate priorities, cross-cutting themes and values set out in the Corporate Strategy. Plans also addressed aspects of social value, community development, skills, hybrid working, restorative practice, continuous improvement and financial controls.

Strategic Measures

- 5.11 The new Corporate Strategy includes a revised Planning and Performance Framework for the 2024-28 period, this details how performance management works at the city council and includes a new set of population outcome and wellbeing measures aligned to the priorities in the strategic plan which will replace the previous set of strategic measures. The performance of the population outcome and wellbeing measures will be reported to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees on an annual basis with a basket of corporate measures considered by members each quarter.

Analytics

- 5.12 During 2024/25 the city council embarked on an important journey to refresh and develop its Data Strategy. This initiative aims to transform how we use data as a corporate asset, enabling smarter decisions, more efficient services, and better outcomes for our residents.

Key elements include:

- A Data Maturity Assessment: To understand where we are today in terms of data governance, quality, and usage.
 - Stakeholder Engagement: Consulting with our staff to capture their needs, challenges, and ideas.
 - Data Governance and Policy Review: Defining clearer roles, responsibilities, and processes for managing data.
 - Enhancing Analytics Capability: Accelerating the implementation of tools like Power BI and self-service dashboards.
 - Scoping Data Products: To be implemented iteratively as part of the data strategy implementation
 - Building a Data Culture: Providing training and fostering a shared commitment to using data effectively.
- 5.13 Utilising analytics and Geographic Information System (GIS) plays a pivotal role in key projects by identifying and addressing specific issues in more deprived and underserved communities.

Management of Risk Arrangements

- 5.14 The city council recognises that the management of risk assists achievement of its objectives, and is committed to identifying and responding to risks which could impact on its strategic aims, business plans and operations. The management of these risks assist members and officers to deliver the city council's priorities. The Corporate Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services (Monitoring Officer) are the joint senior leads for the management of risk. The current

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Management of Risk Policy, which is reviewed on an annual basis, was approved by Cabinet in March 2025 and "...applies to all directorates and to all areas of operation including all service provision, initiatives, projects and developments. It requires that all city council managers, officers and elected members address the issue of day to day risk management and associated risk whilst making any and all policy decisions."

- 5.15 The city council's strategic risk register, which focuses on identifying those risks that may significantly impact on the achievement of its strategic objectives and priorities is maintained and managed by its senior management team, and is reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Audit and Standards Committee and Business Briefing. This is supported by the management of directorate and operational risks, with a framework in place for the recording and maintenance of risk registers by the respective responsible officers. In addition to this the management of risk also forms an integral part of the city council's approach to project governance.
- 5.16 In 2024/2025 the city council's insurers; Zurich, undertook a review of its risk management arrangements. At the time the review noted:
- "Overall, Stoke-on-Trent City Council have a solid basis on which to continue to build strong risk management processes that have the potential to form the basis of a robust risk management approach...We saw substantial evidence to support that service leads were knowledgeable regarding their specific areas of working and understood that risk management had a vital part to play in the stability of the Council."
 - "Our review of the risk registers and subsequent meetings have highlighted that there is a strong basis of risk knowledge within the service areas at Stoke-on-Trent City Council."
- 5.17 In response to the review's report a plan to further develop the city council's approach to the management of risk was put in place. As part of this training continues to be developed with an e-learning module for the Management of Risk now forming part of the Authority's Learning Development suite of e-courses, refresher sessions on the management of risk having been developed for managers and, directorate and operational risk registers continue to be developed and included in the agendas of meetings. Moreover, the further integration of the management of risk within the Authority's planning and governance frameworks continues to be improved. In March 2025 senior officers undertook a workshop to examine the efficacy of the strategic risk register and ensure that it focussed on the Authority's strategic aims and priorities. This presented opportunities to review the Authority's risk appetite, merge similar themed risks under one risk to maintain strategic focus for risk areas or to de-escalate certain risks to a directorate or department level of management where the risks can be more closely managed and monitored through risk reporting. Following these reviews, the strategic risk register, as at the end of the year, listed 21 strategic risks which reflected the potential challenges that faced the city council and retained a clear strategic focus for the risk profile.

Financial Controls & Financial Resilience

- 5.18 19 As outlined above at 3.6 the city council, along with the rest of the local government sector, continues to see growing financial pressure driven by the prevailing economic conditions and persistent levels of inflation. This is a global phenomenon with a mix of

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causes which disproportionately impacts on those local authority areas with a relatively low-wage economy such as Stoke-on-Trent. This has a significant adverse impact on the city council's overall financial position including pay inflation; demand increasing for core services; and goods and services becoming more expensive to buy. This is on top of the significant challenges faced in terms of both Children's and Adults' Social Care which continue to experience pressures in terms of both demand and cost of placements. Further demand pressures in areas such as Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation and SEND are also placing significant strain on the financial resilience of the city council.

- 5.19 The current macroeconomic challenges have resulted in sustained increases in demand for both Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care services at a level and cost that remains financially unsustainable. Investment in early intervention and targeted support proposed within the city council's application for EFS is starting to have an impact on driving down the number of Children requiring social care placements, however, this is not yet having a significant impact on the financial cost of Children's Social Care due to the number of children that remain within high-cost independent residential settings. In order to return the city council to a sustainable financial footing these costs will need to be reduced over the coming period. The city council also faces significant risks due to changes in NHS practices intended to address their own financial challenges; this is likely to lead to new pressures arising across social care and SEND as cost shunts move pressure around the system. The city council will work with partners to try and reduce cost across the system rather than just move them, and will rigorously challenge where it does not believe any redistribution of cost is the legal responsibility of social care. Without a reduction in the costs and risk outlined above it is likely the city council will need further Exceptional Financial Support in future years. In addition to the challenges relating to social care the scale of the High Needs DSG deficit remains a significant risk to financial resilience. Were the current statutory override to be removed at a national level the city council would be at significant risk of a S114 notice due to the current deficit and the future forecast pressures. The sustainability of utilising further Exceptional Financial Support and the treatment of the High Needs deficit will continue to be discussed with central government over the coming period as these issues require a national solution.
- 5.20 To protect the financial position the city council strengthened financial controls across the organisation in 2023/24. These have continued to be refined and embedded, and a range of key measures have been implemented to support the city council's financial sustainability, these include:
- Rigorous scrutiny of all city council expenditure – with a focus on reducing discretionary spending.
 - Maximising external funding opportunities – through strategic bidding and effective utilisation.
 - Strengthening collaboration - with community and voluntary sector organisations.
 - Ongoing review of staffing structures and workforce planning – to ensure alignment with service needs.
 - Enhanced budgetary and financial training - across all departments to build financial awareness and accountability.
 - Proactive budget monitoring - enabling early identification and resolution of financial issues.
 - Robust monitoring mechanisms - including detailed financial discussions at management meetings and the Finance Sustainability Working Group, chaired by the Section 151 Officer.
 - Stricter procurement practices: under the revised Procurement Strategy, all purchasing activity is now centralised through the Central Buying Team (CBiT). CBIT is responsible for ensuring best value in all procurement decisions by evaluating alternative

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products or services, exploring different specifications, broadening supplier options, and verifying the necessity of each expenditure.

- 5.21 The city council continues to aim to hold a minimum balance of circa 5% of the net revenue budget. The city council has also been able to improve financial resilience by contributing to the Strategic Risk Reserve, and retaining capital receipts to support future debt repayment in 2024/25 which would have not been possible in the absence of EFS.
- 5.22 In light of the financial challenges currently faced by the authority, a framework of financial control has been embedded in order to strengthen budget and risk management across the authority:
- Finance Sustainability Working Group (FSWG) – ensuring delivery of a balanced Medium-Term Financial Strategy; appropriate arrangements are in place to monitor and record activity and financial forecasts relating to all demand led budgets; identifying and monitoring future financial risks; and an escalation process to identify and monitor appropriate mitigations is provided where overspends cannot be addressed. It monitors, manages and challenges the use of resources and financial performance across the city council. Additional emphasis being put on embedding a culture of personal responsibility and accountability, performance management and continuous improvement of services through the operational framework.
 - Transformation Board – The transformation programme seeks to embed a culture of continuous change as business as usual and to move towards the city council becoming a learning organisation. The post COVID recovery work is feeding into the programme, assessing how this period has changed service delivery, for example, agile working and channel shift.
 - Commissioning and Contract Management Board - looking at commissioning arrangements across the authority and particularly on children’s and adults’ placements.
 - Establishment Board - to respond to the human resources elements associated with the delivery and financial challenges faced by the city council and to support delivery of an increasingly effective and productive workforce. This will include monitoring of changes to establishment and agency, consultants and interim staff (through a dedicated sub group).
 - Capital and Asset Management Board – to ensure that the city council’s portfolio of significant programmes and projects have been properly tested through a gateway process in terms of deliverability, affordability and VFM and are aligned to strategic objectives and are delivered on time, to quality and to budget.
 - Commercial Board – this monitors commercial financial risk and advises on alternative future delivery models for services in order to drive efficiency. The authority is putting measures in place to ensure that it will be fully compliant with the new Procurement Act when the latter receives Royal Assent. These measures include: briefing members; ensuring that Procurement professionals are participating in Crown Commercial Services briefings; and publishing a Commercial Pipeline well ahead of the statutory date for doing so. Preparation is also taking place for the new subsidy arrangements.
 - Digital & Data Board - an officer sub-board of the Senior Management Team that provides strategic oversight of all digital and data projects and programmes of the city council, to act as a control mechanism and approve all software systems including renewals and major upgrades and to manage and oversee all aspects of data architecture.

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- Annual Assurance Process – These agreements set out the expectations to budget holders with respect to financial and business management and enable budget holders to provide assurance over the financial position as well as to give a mechanism through which risk can be escalated and managed.

5.23 In addition, the Section 151 Officer continues to communicate with all senior managers to outline the significant financial challenge that lies ahead for the city council and to remind managers of their financial management responsibilities as a senior leader in ensuring ownership, accountability and delivery. Communications also set out key opportunities and additional support available. Senior Officers including the S151 Officer and Head of Paid Service remain in regular dialogue with MHCLG regarding the financial challenges faced and the implications for future years.

Financial Management Code

5.24 In support of strengthening the financial framework, CIPFA has developed the Financial Management Code (FM Code), which sets out the principles by which authorities should be guided in managing their finances and the specific standards that they should, as a minimum, seek to achieve. The FM Code standards covers areas including responsibilities of the CFO (Chief Finance Officer)/ leadership team, governance and financial management, Medium Term Financial Plan and financial resilience assessments, the annual budgeting process and monitoring of financial performance.

5.25 The FM Code is designed to be flexible to the nature, needs and circumstances of individual authorities. It is up to each authority to determine the extent to which it complies with the FM Code and to identify what action it may wish to take to better meet the standards that the FM Code sets out. The findings of the initial assessment indicated that the city council are broadly compliant against the FM standards.

5.26 Following the initial assessment, further work has been undertaken to improve longer-term planning by extending the MTFs to 5 years in detail and 10 years at a higher level, and scenario planning is also now evident particularly in respect of Children's Services. In addition, to ensure the strength of financial management, reviews are underway of existing systems such as financial regulations; financial controls; training programme for both members and officers etc to ensure they are sufficiently promoted and embedded. Consideration will also be given to national reports, such as those published in the public interest, to learn from others where applicable. As part of the introduction of the new ERP financial processes and procedures across the city council will be reviewed and updated to strengthen the financial environment.

5.27 The city council continues to face challenges with recruitment and retention of professional finance staff, something that is prevalent nationally but is being experienced more acutely at Stoke-on-Trent City Council despite a relatively successful recruitment campaign over the last 12-18 months in the management accounting side of the business. This creates risk in terms of capacity and capability. A number of measures have been put in place to manage this risk including the use of targeted market supplements to salaries, the

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creation of opportunities for trainee and part-qualified staff and a programme of training development. However, it should be noted that this remains a risk and will be monitored continuously. Interim staff will be used where necessary and proportionate.

Enterprise Resource Planning System

- 5.28 The city council is progressing with the programme to replace our existing Finance and HR systems (Civica Financials and ResourceLink). These systems have become outdated and lack full integration, resulting in our teams having to carry out substantial manual reconciliations, as there is no single central view of our data. This brought about the opportunity to replace these outdated systems with a modern integrated solution, which following a robust selection process undertaken in March 2023, SAP (Systems, Applications and Products) was selected as the preferred ERP (Enterprise Resourcing Planning) solution for HR, Finance, Procurement and Payroll.
- 5.29 The benefits of moving to SAP will mean that managers have improved access to review data for their areas of responsibility. It will enable us to design and implement SAP with best practice processes that are simple, consistent and streamlined, enabling us to become a more effective and efficient city council. It will reduce or eliminate the need for 'off-system' processes as well as reducing transaction processing and administration times, meaning that we can focus on more value added activities. The system is a modern digital solution, with a high degree of usability, self-service and mobile capability to increase data entry compliance. It will also allow residents and suppliers to be captured as one golden record rather than different references in various systems, which will support the city council's data strategy. The timeline is currently being assessed based on emerging requirements and digital solutions, ensuring a robust implementation delivering real transformation to the city council. Recent reviews by Local Partnerships and Civiteq have highlighted good overall governance, additional resource requirements and some areas to improve and these recommendations are being built into the planning and programme management.

Commercial Risk

- 5.30 The current economic climate also creates significant commercial risk for the city council due to high inflation and in-turn high annual pay awards. The cost-of-living crisis continues to impact on the levels of income the city council might ordinarily expect to see from external customers and residents. This is also having a direct impact on general traded services within the city council. To mitigate this, additional governance continues through two key boards in order to provide additional oversight of financial and commercial risk. The Financial Sustainability Working group, chaired by the S.151 Officer and attended by the Deputy Section S.151 Officer, Chief Executive, External Financial Improvement Advisor and the finance Portfolio Holder meets monthly to discuss financial strategy and to ensure the stewardship and implementation of the Financial Improvement and Recover Plan, which was implemented following the receipt of EFS in 2023/24. The Senior Management Team (SMT) also regularly receives formal updates of financial performance from the S.151 and allows for action to be taken where performance is not on target. The Commercial Board, also chaired by the S.151

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Officer, allows for management and oversight of commercial risk, transformational change and a forward-looking analysis of service delivery models.

- 5.31 Robust governance around the authorities wholly owned companies, Fortior Homes and Unitas, has also been a core part of managing financial and operating risk including the smooth transition of Unitas back into the city council as of April 2025. A refinancing of company debt within Fortior Homes has been successfully completed this year (April 2025) which will provide a stable and sustainable financial platform for the company in what remains a volatile economic climate. The authority is not however immune to the impact of high-inflation and rising interest rates which will inevitably impact on the risk profile of a number of areas of the city council, including its commercial investments. The city council therefore continues to closely monitoring risk around all capital loans, investments, traded services and developments.

Recruitment & Retention

- 5.32 The city council continues to face a number of recruitment and retention challenges, which are felt across a wide range of roles. This is not a position that is unique to the city council as 90% of all local authorities are reporting the same concerns. In order to try and address the challenges, the city council has a Recruitment Transformation project that is designed to review the end to end processes involved and transform the current offering to one that will enable the city council to address it's challenges in the short and medium term. The restructure of the Workforce Team has strengthened the recruitment team as this is a key area of focus for the city council to proactively manage the challenges with innovative solutions.
- 5.33 The city council are also continuing to face similar challenges in respect of retention. It is evident that it continues to be an applicant's market and that salary levels across the private sector, coupled with the continued trends of hybrid working, means that there are more opportunities than ever for employees to earn higher rates of pay and without having to move out of the area. The city council continue to address this through market supplements on a number of roles and continue to review pay and grading structures. However, the city council is also mindful of its financial situation and therefore increased salary levels cannot and should not be the only answer. The city council are continually reviewing how to improve job quality and also looking at developing career development opportunities. In addition to this the city council remains resolute in its approach to offering learning and development opportunities to all of its employees. The positive news is that staff turnover has reduced in 2024/25.

Cyber Security Arrangements

- 5.34 Cyber attacks are an ongoing risk for all organisations including the city council. With the changing threat landscape and ever improving capabilities of attackers, the city council is continually reviewing its cyber security measures. This includes improving the technical security protections, mandatory cyber security training for staff, business continuity planning, and testing of the processes and measures. The city council has continued to develop its partnership with the local health authorities and county council, providing

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visibility of threats across Staffordshire, coordinating responses, and benefiting from the experience and capabilities of the partners. The city council is also ensuring directorate Business Continuity Plans explicitly cover IT outages, so that all functions are prepared to operate without ICT for a sustained period.

- 5.35 Information Governance best practice has continued to develop within the authority. A cyber security audit has been carried out, including a penetration test exercise, which is on the whole positive and useful feedback has been provided which will form an action plan to be actioned. The Information Governance Group continued to develop chaired by the SIRO (senior Information Risk Owner), Vice-chaired by the Caldicott Guardian and Cyber Security Manager and including the city council's Data Protection Officer and representatives from legal, communications, IT, Information Rights, Learning and Development and each department. The group continues to be effective in raising the profile of Information Governance with each directorate now having its own group. The authority continued working with public sector partners in the region, collaborating to improve the detection and response to cyber threats.

6. Other Governance Improvements

Corporate Governance

- 6.1 During 2024/5 the city council's officer assurance process for all senior managers has become embedded. The process is designed to set the culture and tone of what is expected of managers in discharging their responsibilities as well as providing managers with the opportunity to identify areas where additional support or training is required. Following completion of surveys in 2024/5, key areas have been collated and reported to SMT to inform future governance arrangements. The results of the surveys were positive in a number of areas, including:

- 100% of respondents confirmed that they will continue to operate with the assurance framework and conduct themselves in accordance with the city council's policies and procedures.
- All respondents stated they regularly monitor expenditure against their budget
- All respondents understood the key legislation governing their areas
- 77%) indicated that they and their team(s) were up to date with cyber security training and of the 23% that were not fully up to date, the majority indicated that training was either largely complete or ongoing.
- 92%) of respondents confirmed that employed workforce aligns with the agreed establishment. Where exceptions were noted, all confirmed HR were fully aware of these.
- 96%) of respondents confirmed they understood their responsibilities regarding declarations of interest

- 6.2 In addition, the assurance process highlighted a number of areas for further improvement as follows:

- Some respondents indicated their risk register were not up to date or in place

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- Some respondents identified a need for further training in relation to delegated decisions
- Some respondents identified a need for further training in relation to how to procure in accordance with the law, constitution and city council procedures
- Some respondents indicated they had outstanding internal audit recommendations to implement.
- 10% of respondents indicated that business continuity plans had not been reviewed in the past six months
- 39% of respondents confirmed that mandatory training had not been fully complete, additional comments indicated that arrangements were largely in place to address this

6.3 The city council has a confidential reporting procedure in place which provides a process to encourage people working with the city council to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that they are able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals; their confidentiality will be respected; and their concerns will be taken seriously and properly investigated where appropriate. The number, nature and outcomes of confidential disclosures made to city council officers is recorded and monitored. During 2024/25 there were two referrals made under the confidential reporting procedure, both of which are now closed. In 2023/24 no referrals were made under the procedure.

6.3 Chief Officer declarations of interest are available online and reviewed annually. Declarations of Interest and gifts and hospitality declarations for other officers are available to register online, but further work is needed to ensure full compliance. The officer level strategic co-ordinating boards continue to operate well and are in the process of being rationalised and included within the strategic mission boards that have been created to consolidate resources around priorities.

6.4 The city council continues to have efficient mechanisms in place to manage its decision making processes that ensure each report receives legal and financial consideration which in turn acts as the eyes and ears for the relevant statutory officer. The city council also has an advanced system of report clearing for Cabinet which involves portfolio holder briefings, clearance by Chief Executive and Leader and Business Briefing, these all assist in ensuring that due diligence has taken place. The city council also has a robust systems of officer level boards to co-ordinate governance. The city councils internal audit function continues to add significantly to the city council's corporate governance framework and is currently undertaking a piece of reactive work with regard to Adult Social Care and decision making, which will be reported in due course.

6.5 As a result of the 2023/24 review of the procurement operating model, and informed by the procurement effectiveness framework, there were 7 core objectives which set out the basis for transformation of a new procurement and commercial services organisation. These objectives have now been adopted in a Procurement Strategy for 2024 – 2027:

- Develop and implement a new 3-year Procurement Strategy for 2024 - 2027.

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- Implement a new Operating Model that is both “fit for purpose” and drives value for money.
- Adopt a common strategic approach for all tendered activity.
- Implement a common approach to support devolved Contracts Management and improved Supplier Relationship Management.
- Create a “commercially confident” and high performing team.
- Adoption of improved commercial governance.
- Ensure Source to Contract and P2P systems are effective in unlocking value for the city council

- 6.6 Procurement and Commercial Services as a centralised entity was launched in late 2024 through a transformation of sourcing, contracts management and supplier payments, and sets out the approach the city council are taking to achieve best value through the use of professional and “commercially confident” resources as well as the use of technology, innovation, best practices and procedures. This approach is an ambitious programme of continuous improvement, which sets high standards for procurement and all staff across the city council. It is supported by a three-year plan to drive further improvement in procurement performance, matching not only the city council’s own aspirations but national good practice benchmarks.
- 6.7 The online report management process introduced in 2023 using the Modern.gov platform, continues to be embedded and it is intended to extend this to other committees and Chief Officer decisions. With regard to Chief Officer decisions, the city council continues to work on a basis that those of significance or are above £50,000 should be published. Whilst there is good adherence to this in the Resources and Housing Development, Growth and Operations Directorates this is less so in Public Health, Children’s and Adults Directorates and further work on governance is needed to ensure compliance.
- 6.8 The complaints and ombudsman processes and system improvements made last year have been embedded and it is intended to roll out restorative pilots over the coming year. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman released their annual review letter for 2024/25 which indicates how well the city council is performing, compared to other similar authorities.
- 6.9 The member casework system has been reviewed following concerns from both members and officers due to its operation, whilst some improvement have been made in terms of timeliness of response it is the view of the Monitoring Officer that the system has been made cumbersome through previous adaptations requested by the city council, which whilst well intentioned are not necessary. Work is being scoped to make the improvements to the system.
- 6.10 Member development in Stoke-on-Trent is continuous and an integral part of the city council’s business and opportunities for Member development are sought in a variety of ways, which can include simple signposting to national programs and opportunities, all Member Briefings and briefings delivered to political groups. Sessions remain popular and well attended.

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- 6.11 The Local Government Association (LGA) offers a range of peer-supported improvement programmes, including Peer Challenge and Councillor Mentoring. Peer challenge and peer support are fundamental parts to support self-regulation and sector-led improvement. Member peers are accredited to support councils and their councillors with their improvement and learning by providing a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge. Each of the four political groups at the LGA has a pool of expert peers able to confidentially advise members. This is arranged directly through political groups.
- 6.12 On 16 December, the Government published its Devolution White Paper requiring all local authority areas in geographies made up of two tier authorities and neighbouring unitaries to collaborate to create a combination of (Mayoral) Strategic Authorities at a preferred population level of at least 1.5 million people and unitary local government with each authority at a minimum size of 500,000 people. The Staffordshire Leaders' Board submitted an interim plan on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to Government on 21st March 2025 in accordance with the required deadlines and the indication from Government that it expected all councils to work together. The Government requires councils to submit their full proposals by 28th November 2025. With respect to local government reform in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, there are two leading proposals at this current stage. The first, promoted by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and six of the district councils – Cannock, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, East Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth – is for a two unitary model probably based on the following split:
- North Staffordshire: Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands
 - Mid and Southern Staffordshire: Cannock, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, East Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth

The second proposal is also for a two unitary model promoted by the County Council whereby Stoke-on-Trent would remain on its current boundaries and Staffordshire would become the second unitary covering the rest of the geography. There is more consensus with respect to the potential footprint for a Mayoral Strategic Authority with broad agreement that a Staffordshire-wide geography potentially makes most sense.

- 6.13 There are multiple advantages of the city council's preferred model for LGR. It is compliant with the government's preferences with respect to minimum size of authorities, it makes more sense with respect to natural socio-economic regions and it offers a good balance in terms of future financial resilience of both authorities. It also makes more sense in terms of the preferred devolution geography, as a Staffordshire unitary of over 900,000 population would dominate the Mayoral Strategic Authority landscape, failing the Government's test of maintaining appropriate ratios. The government's feedback on the interim plan is expected early June 2025.
- 6.14 Staffordshire Leaders Board was established to improve joint working between the County, City, District and Borough Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, focusing on joint approaches to the big issues that affect everyone, including the economy, public health and reducing carbon emissions. The terms of reference include the following:

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- Climate Change – bringing together strategies, skills and expertise for reaching Net Zero.
- Waste – strengthening the waste partnership, exploring greater collaboration on waste collection, and improve recycling.
- Economy – continuing to create the right conditions for economic growth, and the creation of more, better-paid jobs and opportunities for the people of Staffordshire.
- Improving Public Services – Making it as simple and easy for the people of Staffordshire to interact and engage with local public services.
- Health Inequalities –In support of the establishment of the Integrated Care System and the Health and Wellbeing Board, there is an opportunity for local government partners in Staffordshire to work better, together to tackle many issues that have a significant impact on health, such as housing, parks and open spaces, leisure centres and employment.

The Leaders Board has enabled the councils to work together to develop the interim Devolution and LGR plans.

- 6.15 The city council continues to pursue a very practical approach to tackling the climate emergency by identifying and pursuing individual programmes and projects that it considers can make the biggest difference, particularly with respect to energy generation and efficiency, public transport, air quality and tree planting. Following the publication in 2023 of its energy and decarbonisation strategy the city council has pursued activities in line with the agreed action plan. The current administration through its strategic and co-ordinated approach to sustainability is now developing a more comprehensive Sustainability Strategy and recruiting additional staff to support this agenda. Addressing climate change continues to be a requirement of all Cabinet members through their portfolios and all relevant city council strategies, plans and programmes. Additionally, all procurement now takes sustainability and corporate social responsibility into account. The city council has committed to working with local and regional stake holders and have officially signed a charter committing to building a sustainable and fair future for the city and county as we look to take further steps to combat climate change. The city council is committed to the government's target of being 'net zero' taking out more greenhouse gases from the atmosphere than it puts in. The charter, by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Celebration of the Possible (COP) an alliance that brings together communities, councils, academics and other partners around a shared vision of a happier, healthier future based on better stewardship of the environment.
- 6.16 From 2018-19 to 2024-25, the city council has reduced grid power consumption by 31% and related carbon emissions by 48%; and reduced gas consumption by 23% and related carbon emissions by 18%. Optimising use of solar and CHP systems in key buildings has seen the city council increase by around 20% the generation and consumption of lower cost, secure, low carbon energy. Furthermore, the city council is actively procuring utilities (electricity, gas and water) resulting, the city council's utilities rates to be the lowest in England and Wales. The success of the procurement model for purchasing energy has resulted in a wider framework incorporating University Hospital North Midlands and Stoke-on-Trent College supporting the wider public sector in the city. Work is also

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underway to support schools through option to jointly purchase energy, making savings and enabling investment in renewables and energy efficiency. The city council continues to try to identify and secure further opportunities to make efficiencies and reduce carbon with further investment in energy efficiency in its estate and social housing stock utilising where possible grant funding to accelerate the process. As the city council and government agenda and policy evolves around net zero, the city council will continue to deliver decarbonisation projects which will be configured into a city wide approach to net zero in the future.

- 6.17 The city council has led the development of a partnership prospectus – called Future 100 - which sets out a fresh vision for Stoke-on-Trent's growth and prosperity. It is based around five missions and sets out a bold set of actions that, together, aim to transform the city's economy and unlock prosperity and opportunity for decades to come. The prospectus, which is called "Shaping Our City: Growth for All", has been drawn up by a city coalition including prominent politicians, business leaders, academics, and figures from the health and voluntary sectors. It is supported by Stoke-on-Trent's three MPs as well as the city council. The prospectus is pitched as a partnership offer with Government – making clear that targeted interventions and investment will be needed to fully realise Stoke-on-Trent's potential.
- 6.18 The delivery of the prospectus will be overseen by a strategic partnership board comprising key partners across the city, with the first meeting on 23rd June 2025. There will be a board for each of the five missions which will work towards drawing partnership activity together. The first phase delivery plan has been drawn up which will be presented to Government during the summer of 2025 with the goal of securing funding and commitment for a range of projects and programmes that will improve outcomes for the people of Stoke-on-Trent.

Community Energy Scheme (CES) Group Claim.

- 6.19 We have been notified that a Class action (Group Claim) has been issued within the court. We are informed that the action is being taken by a group of individuals against CES and ourselves in relation to the installation of solar panels on some city council properties. At this stage we have not been served with any court papers in relation to this claim so cannot comment further as to the validity of this claim. We will defend as appropriate any allegations that are made against the Authority.

7. Children's Services

- 7.1 Children's Services continues to face very significant challenges due to a combination of demand pressures and a lack of sufficiency of homes for children in care, in particular foster placements. The Financial Sustainability Working Group carefully scrutinises planned activity against system pressures. The children's services budget is currently insufficient to manage the demand within the system. Within Children in Care Placements, strenuous efforts to review and step children down (where it is safe to do so alongside ensuring

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the best outcomes for the young people in our care) are being progressed and work is ongoing to reduce overall volumes of work. The impact of early intervention initiatives has not yet had a significant impact on placement budgetary pressures.

- 7.2 The Local Government Association was asked to conduct a review of our corporate parenting board to support our overall improvement efforts and to explore ways to enhance our current corporate parenting strategy. The peer review on 17-18 June 2024. A report was given to the city council after the review, and feedback was presented to the senior leadership team of the city council, as well as key elected members and partners. Key changes to our approach have been developed and implemented. The new corporate Parenting Board, accounting for all the recommendations, went live in April 2025.
- 7.3 The CSC (Children's Social Care) Placement Sufficiency Strategy has been updated and there is a focus within commissioning to improve market management of children's residential placements which are placing a huge financial burden on the city council's budget. Whilst the city council has a number of foster carers this has reduced over the last 2 years, our sufficiency remains insufficient for need. A refreshed digital recruitment campaign has been launched with early indicators showing an increase in the number of potential foster carer's who wish to be assessed. There is a national shortage of suitable foster homes for children in care (the recent Care Review recommended that central government invests to secure an additional 9,000 foster carers). Consequently, there are instances in which Stoke-on-Trent children, who could be in foster care, are required to live in children's homes because there is no foster carer availability.
- 7.4 The children's social care market is reasonably healthy in that, for the most part, providers do not appear to be at any immediate financial risk. However, there are insufficient quality homes for children with complex needs. In addition, market pressures have resulted in significant increases in the cost of placements which represents a significant challenge for the local authority. In response to these issues the city council has continued to cement a variety of changes:
- Produced an updated Sufficiency Strategy and Implementation Plan. This sets out precisely how we plan to secure additional foster care, residential care and supported accommodation for our cared for children.
 - Regular provider network events to build effective joint working with local providers and engage them in discussion about how they can provide the specific homes our children need.
 - Additional scrutiny of the highest cost placements. Panel processes have been reviewed and strengthened in 2024/25 and financial monitoring is now linked to placement planning more directly. Additional accountant capacity has supported this development.
 - Review of the fee breakdown we ask for from providers so that it is less onerous for them, whilst giving us the key information we need to understand value for money of the placement.

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- 7.5 As evidenced in the Competition and Market's Authority report of 2022, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care of May 2022, the previous Government consultation response to this review - Stable Homes, Built on Love (February 2023) and the new Government's Children's Well Being and Schools Bill going through parliament currently, there is recognition that the children's placement market is broken. The national picture is also evident in Stoke-on-Trent where we struggle to find homes for 10-15% of our children in care with the most complex needs. There is a lack of sufficiency in particular in relation to the availability of foster placements both internally and externally which can result in children being placed in high-cost residential children's homes.
- 7.6 The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership continues to grow in maturity, with new arrangements in place for multi-agency partners to share leadership. Multi-agency partnership arrangements include an Executive Board, Quality Assurance Group and sub-groups for Practice Review and Learning and Development. The city council has also established a new Education Safeguarding sub-group to develop our leadership and assurance in this space. The city council has agreed a quality assurance and scrutiny framework, which is being implemented alongside our multi-agency training programme. The city council has now published its second annual report and continue to progress against partnership priorities and to implement learning from practice reviews. Audit activity has progressed in 2023/2024 and s175 and s11 audits have been completed.
- 7.7 The city council has a quality assurance framework in place for children's social care and continue to further develop quality assurance arrangements across education services. The city council has an established programme management approach providing senior management with a clear line of sight and timely oversight of the large range of project plans which support the over-arching Continuous Improvement Plan and delivery of key directorate strategies. The city council use service area and a directorate risk register to manage and mitigate emerging strategic risks. In addition, there are regular reports to DfE, particularly in relation to Early Years, SEND, NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and attendance which monitor performance against deliverables and statutory compliance.
- 7.8 Due to the pressures identified in the High Needs Block funding and the need to manage the Safety Valve agreement, the city council has established a High Needs Board, chaired by the Chief Executive. The DfE approved a safety valve payment of £10 million, subject to compliance and satisfactory progress with certain conditions set. This funding was received over a 4 year period (£9.1 million to reduce the deficit and £0.9 million capacity funding). The overall deficit on Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as at 31 March 2024 was £12.4 million. Additional cumulative net pressures of £10.1 million were identified during 2024/25, resulting in a year end carry forward deficit of £22.4m. An agreed action plan which initially covered the financial years from 2020/21 to 2023/24, focused on two key strands: firstly, to reduce the number of independent sector placements (to be achieved through the increase of provision within the city including expansion of special schools, resource bases and free schools); and secondly, to work with mainstream schools to

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ensure that the pupils with special educational needs can have appropriate provision within a mainstream setting. A refreshed improvement plan has now been put in place.

- 7.9 Due to emerging challenges relating to forecast increases in the demand for EHCPs (Education Health Care Plans), costly placements in independent settings, alternative provision placements due to rising exclusions and delays in capital project delivery, there are significant pressures forecast against the High Needs Block which will make delivery against the existing profiles very difficult. The city council are currently reviewing potential mitigating actions to address these challenges. The High Needs Board meets regularly to analyse the data and financial trajectories and oversees the match of funding to need in order to meet statutory duties for vulnerable learners. The new Inclusion Board monitors the statutory duty with regard to learners with SEND and those who are vulnerable and in need of additional/ specialist support. Preparing for Ofsted inspections, multi-agency working, funding, expenditure, provision, co-production of alternative provision, transition and quality of provision all form part of the work of the Board. Due to these unforeseen factors, the original Safety Valve agreement has failed to meet its target of bringing the DSG back in to balance by financial year 2023-24. As a result, the city council approached the DfE for an extension to the Safety Valve and a request for additional funding to cover these extenuating circumstances and additional pressures uncovered. The DfE have confirmed that that they will not be able to provide further support through the Safety Valve programme. The DfE have advised that they will provide expert advisor support to the local authority through the usual Regions Group channels and discussions have begun with providers about a remedial plan to address the deficit position.

8. **Adult Social Care**

- 8.1 The city council continues to face challenges in terms increasing costs of care, the city council invests more than £126m (gross) each year in commissioned adults social care services, and Cabinet have agreed to invest an additional £7.355m per year through the approval of the 2025/26 Fee Strategy. The Fee Strategy covers the fees across all adult social care commissioned provision including Care Homes, Supported Living, Extra Care, and Home Care, as well as Direct Payments (Personal Assistant) and Shared Lives. Cabinet also approved the development of a 3 yearly cost of care exercise to be undertaken as part of the adult social care fee setting process.
- 8.2 The number of people receiving domiciliary care services in their home is increasing but not at the rate that should be expected while the number of people entering care homes (including nursing homes) has increased significantly over the past 12 months, particularly in residential care. Commissioners and brokerage staff have continued to develop alternative options to residential care, including Extra Care, Supported Living and the development of micro-providers and direct payments.

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- 8.3 The Joint Commissioning Board (JCB) was established originally as a mechanism to oversee the in-year delivery of the Better Care Fund (BCF), a pooled budget for the purpose of integration of health and social care, and is accountable to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Health and Wellbeing Board formally sign off the Better Care Fund Plan for 2024-2025, to be delivered and monitored by the JCB. The services commissioned through the BCF are in the process of being reviewed over 2024-25 and into 2025-26 to ensure that they offer the best value for money and deliver support to prevent people from being admitted to hospital and if admitted, upon discharge are supported to return to their own home. The high levels of residential care are being driven by demand through hospital discharges and so ensuring that this funding delivers better outcomes is a key priority going into 2025-26.
- 8.4 The contract monitoring and quality assurance of commissioned care providers is currently being reviewed, with the development of a Provider Market Quality Framework through the existing and effective Market Oversight Group (MOG). Care Quality Commission (CQC) data shows that the quality of care provision across the City is of high quality with the majority of care rated as 'Good' or above. This is supported by our internal Quality Assurance and Improvement processes and insight. The Commissioning team have been working more proactively with care providers to identify any concerns and to work with providers to address issues before they escalate. Commissioners have also been reviewing how to better engage with people in receipt of social care services and involve them and their carers in commissioning and reviewing commissioned services.
- 8.5 The Care Act 2014 places a duty on each local authority to establish a Safeguarding Adult Board (SAB) and specifies the responsibilities of the local authority and connected partners with whom they work, to protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. The Board has a broad membership of partners in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and is chaired by an independent chair appointed by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council in conjunction with Board members. The Safeguarding Partnership Board publishes an annual report, and also a 'more accessible' version, outlining updates from the previous year and how this work has contributed to effective practice in all areas. The board is committed to learning and improving practice from safeguarding adult reviews. They host a programme of learning events through the year to assist with the delivery of Review findings and the SSASPB (Stoke and Staffordshire Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board) Strategic Plan. The local authority has a safeguarding team that includes professional leads & social workers to work with commissioning to support providers in any areas of concerns from a safeguarding perspective and better manage Large Scale Enquiries. This includes a preventative approach to escalations. The local authority has multi agency working at the centre of our safeguarding processes with the partners under the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) linked to the local authority's new front door model, plus the implementation of the "Pit Stop" model of multi-agency triage. The local authority is in full attendance at all board executive meetings and sub-group meetings focusing on all areas of safeguarding vulnerable adults including prevention and engagement and the SAR (Safeguarding Adult Review) sub group.

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- 8.6 The 'People' Commissioning and Contracts Board (CoCo Board) covers the Children and Family Services and Adult Social Care, and All Age Commissioning directorate, and Public Health Commissioning activity. This Board has recently been reviewed since the development of the city council's Procurement Assurance Board (PAB) and oversight of the delivery of the 3-year Commissioning and Procurement Plan covering spend on spot and block contracts sitting within children's, adults and public health. The Board provides effective governance and oversight of activity and spend across these areas and in addition to PAB is also aligned with the Commercial Board. The work of the CoCo Board ensures the completion of performance, risk, issues and risks as well as cross cutting development and early oversight of the development and transformation of new care models and service re-design. The Commercial Board oversees the development of the commercial activities of the city council, including supporting the city council in its shareholder function with respect to the two arms-length companies, in its delivery of traded services and in broader commercial activity as required. The Commercial Board will be chaired by the city council's Section 151 Officer. The PAB provides a new gateway approach to Procurement and is aligned to the Commercial Board.
- 8.7 A Judicial Review was taken against the Authority in relation to the decision made on 4th July 2024 about the value of fee increases that were to be offered to Care Home Providers through a contract put into place in April 2019. The Court were asked to consider the following points;
1. Inadequate/unfair consultation process.
 2. Failure to consider relevant or material considerations
 3. Breach of Public Sector Equality Act.
 4. Failure to act with applicable statutory guidance.
 5. Breach of Article 8 ECHR
 6. Irrationality of decision.
- 8.8 On the 27th January 2025, the Judge hearing this case made full, partial or qualified findings in respect of grounds 1,2,3,4,and 6. Ground 5 was dismissed. As a result of the Judicial Review decision, the Authority were required to re-take the decision of the 4th July 2024 by 24th February 2025. This was undertaken having due regard to the decision of the court . The outcome was unchanged as a result of the authority re-taking the decision. Based on legal advice, the city council decided not to appeal the decision as the grounds for appeal were not deemed to be efficient. The city council have ensured that the implications of the decision have been reflected in the fee setting strategy for 2025/26 and that wider lessons have been learned and translated into the council's contracting practice more generally.

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9. Public Health

- 9.1 The public health grant is used to provide a range of vital preventative services that help to support health. During 2024/25 the city council undertook a range of activities to review how this grant was been spent to ensure best use of resources. Activities included:
- benchmarking against other local authorities on the amount of spend to wider city council services and reviewing against regional peers.
 - Reviewing all contributions made to city council services, i.e. the non-mandated public health spend.
 - Reviewing all city council budgets to consider which services were most appropriate to receive a contribution, based on the level of public health benefit expected, reflecting the conditions for the use of the grant
 - Services which should not continue to receive a contribution were identified and stopped
 - A set of criteria has been introduced as a framework to guide allocation which is regularly reviewed
 - A form, known as a Plan on a Page (PoaP), was developed to be completed by all Service Managers whose service was to receive a contribution to set out the public health benefits to be leveraged and how these would be evidenced and regularly reviewed
 - A guidance document was also developed which sets out the principles of investment in line with grant conditions

10. Planning and Housing

- 10.1 The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) are an independent government funded group that completed a review of the city council's planning service in April 2023. The review covered three areas: Planning Policy and the Local Plan, Development Management and Enforcement, Planning Obligations/S106 governance. The implementation of the recommendations made by the PAS review have continued to progress well over the last year. In Development Management, updates to the scheme of delegation, code of conduct and the completion of a new draft Local List have all been completed. The draft Local List will be consulted on shortly. Work to take a firmer approach with applicants and their agents has also continued; with the expected challenges managed and a consistent line held. The new back office IT system is due to go-live and whilst there will still be work to conclude this project, it will be a major milestone. The next major phase of work is centred on engagement with local planning agents and developers to improve the quality of submissions. In respect of Planning Policy, the recommendations around governance and accountability have been implemented. The recommendations made more generally around capacity and resource have also made progress. The new draft Local Plan has also progressed well and in accordance with the approved timetable.
- 10.2 As part of an enhanced regulatory system, the government introduced the Building Safety Act 2022 to better manage high-risk residential buildings, defined as those buildings greater than 7 storeys or 18m in height. The city council has 16 such residential buildings in its council housing stock, and in the first instance was required to register all such buildings with the Building Safety

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Regulator (established as a part of the 2022 act) by the 30th September 2023 which has been completed. Any changes proposed to these high-risk buildings that require building control consent will be determined by the Building Safety Regulator, rather than the city council's building control team. Furthermore, the city council as landlord is required by the Building Safety Act 2022 to prepare building safety cases for each of its high-risk buildings, which set out how the health and safety risks of the buildings are being managed. These building safety cases have now all been drafted and are pending final review. Alongside this, a High Rise Resident Engagement Strategy has been developed and consulted on with residents for each of the high-rise residential buildings, and is nearing final approval stages.

Asset Management

10.3 In October 2024, Cabinet approved a new Land and Property Asset Management Plan for the period 2024-2029. Adopting a CIPFA-recommended approach, the Asset Management Plan comprises the following:

- A series of asset management priorities aligned to the city council's strategic priorities
- An asset management strategy setting out the approach to maximising the contribution the city council's land and buildings make towards the delivery of the city council's strategic priorities
- A comprehensive action plan integrated with asset management plans and strategies across other service areas (Highways, HRA, etc.).

The Land and Property Asset Management Plan restates the city council's commitment to the operation of a Corporate Landlord model, providing a single point of control for the operational land and property estate, delivering economies of scale by consolidating resources, enabling a more integrated approach to the planning and delivery of property solutions and identifying opportunities for greater partnership working across the public sector. In addition, Corporate Property have initiated a programme of works to commence in 2025 to provide a detailed report on the city council's public and corporate buildings condition and assets. The report will provide an asset life cycle, budget repair costs, current asset condition accompanied with a clear profile to improve future unknown budgetary spend analysis.

10.4 The city council are in contract with Transform Schools Stoke on Trent Ltd (TSSL) for the delivery of a maintenance and facilities management service for some 88 schools across the city council's education estate. Given the complexity of the handback process, a dedicated project team and programme board have been established under the oversight of the Chief Executive to deliver handback and mitigate this risk. High-inflation over recent years has added significant cost pressure to the remaining identified Handback works that may now exceed the remaining funds available within the contract mechanism. As of May 2025, a Post-Expiry Works Agreement has been entered into between the city council and TSSL which provides for a further period for TSSL to complete the remaining works where it is their obligation to do so. As part of this, the city council has also stepped in to provide backstop funding to mitigate, where possible, the risk that the remaining funding in the contract mechanism is insufficient to carry out the remaining required works. The city council continues to liaise closely with all schools to support them through the handback process as well as working with the

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Department for Education and the Government National Infrastructure & Service Transformation Authority (previously known as Infrastructure and Projects Authority).

11. Partnerships

- 11.1 The city council currently has a number of entities in which it has an interest either as an owner, shareholder or as a member. These include Fortior Homes Ltd; Unitas Stoke-on-Trent Ltd; Stoke-on-Trent Regeneration Ltd and Stoke Energy Co Ltd. The latter company is dormant. The city council wants these ventures to be successful, however, they do come with a degree of risk. The city council needs to ensure it has robust processes and arrangements in place to protect its interests and to ensure that, as shareholder and lender, the city council can be assured the companies are effectively managed. The city council has now insourced its housing maintenance function and arrangements are now being made to close down the company.

12. Significant Governance Issues

- 12.1 In 2024/25 no further significant governance issues were identified other than those included in this statement. All findings of regulatory inspections received during the period covered by this statement are being addressed and progress will be reported at regular intervals through the appropriate committee.

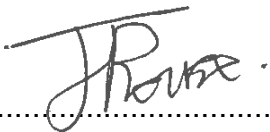
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13. Declaration by City Council

- 13.1 We have been advised on the results of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Audit and Standards Committee. The city council continues to develop plans to ensure continuous improvement of the arrangements are in place and these will continue to be enhanced.
- 13.2 Over the coming year, we will continue to strengthen the city council's governance arrangements and will monitor the implementation of recommendations to improve and enhance the arrangements as part of our next annual review.

Signed:

.....  Leader of the Council: Cllr Jane Ashworth
Date: 24 March 2026

.....  Chief Executive: Jon Rouse
Date: 24 March 2026

.....  Section 151 Officer: Nick Edmonds
Date: 24 March 2026

.....  Monitoring Officer: James Doble
Date: 24 March 2026

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APPENDIX 1

Principle A – Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PA.1	<p>The city council promotes high standards of ethical behaviour by developing, maintaining and monitoring a Code of Conduct for Members of the city council. The Code of Conduct clearly sets out the standards expected for elected Councillors to ensure they operate in a clear, transparent manner and treat each other, and members of the public, with respect and courtesy. The Code and the city council’s policies and procedures are communicated via corporate induction sessions and are available on the city council’s intranet site.</p>	<p>Members Code of Conduct & Staff Code of Conduct are included in the city council’s Constitution</p> <p><u>Constitution</u></p>
PA.2	<p>The Codes of Conduct for Members and city council employees include the requirement to disclose interests (including statutory Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) and to declare gifts and hospitality. The Members Gifts and Hospitality Register is available on the city council’s website on the Transparency pages.</p>	<p><u>Councillor’s Register of Interests</u></p>
PA.3	<p>Comprising of nine councillors, allocated on the basis of the political composition of the council, the city council’s Audit and Standards Committee is responsible for helping Members to adhere to the Members Code of Conduct and promoting other elements of sound ethical behaviour.</p> <p>The Committee, in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer, deals with complaints against Members and this may involve the undertaking of investigations or some other form of action being taken, such as additional training. The Committee also issues (and updates) local codes of guidance from time to time, such as a Code on Criminal Records Bureau checks and guidance on dealing with planning and licensing determinations.</p>	<p><u>Audit and Standards Committee</u></p> <p><u>Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2022</u></p>

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<p>PA.4</p>	<p>A full review of procurement has been undertaken in 2023. As a result of this, and informed by the procurement effectiveness framework, the city council has adopted a procurement strategy for 2024 - 2027. Procurement and commercial services through a transformation of sourcing, contracts management and supplier payments, sets out the approach the council is taking to achieve best value through the use of professional and “commercially confident” resources as well as the use of technology, innovation, best practices and procedures.</p>	<p><u>Procurement Strategy 2024 - 2027</u></p> <p><u>Procurement Code</u></p> <p><u>Responsible Procurement Code</u></p> <p><u>Commercial Strategy</u></p>
<p>PA.5</p>	<p>The city council has an established corporate compliments, comments and complaints process. In the event that the procedure is exhausted, the Ombudsman is required to carry out an investigation into a complaint.</p> <p>The Ombudsman's Annual letter is published on the <u>LGO's</u> own website in July each year.</p>	<p><u>Compliments, Comments and Complaints Process</u></p> <p><u>Stoke-on-Trent City Council Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy 2024</u></p> <p><u>Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code</u></p> <p><u>LGO Annual Review Letter 2024</u></p>
<p>PA.6</p>	<p>The city council has a Counter-Fraud & Error Strategy as well as a Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure to ensure that members and employees of the authority are not influenced by prejudice, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with different stakeholders. The Audit and Standards Committee receives regular update reports outlining progress in implementing key anti-fraud actions to protect the city council's interests.</p>	<p><u>Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption & Error April 2024</u></p> <p><u>Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption & Error April 2025</u></p> <p><u>Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PB.1	The city council publishes its decisions on its website; on this page you can find a record of executive decisions made under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations	<u>Notice of Decisions</u>
PB.2	The city council is committed to openness and transparency. Meeting items are only discussed in private if they absolutely cannot be discussed in any other way ³ . City council and Cabinet Meetings are broadcast live on the internet, and are available online to be watched after the event.	<u>City council Meeting Webcasts</u> <u>Cabinet & City Council Meetings</u>
PB.3	<p>The city council places communications at the centre of all that it does. The communications strategy which is underpinned by the city council’s vision sets out an approach which aims to improve communications with local people as well as a number of key stakeholders across the city through a series of pre-agreed campaigns. This approach proactively supports engaging local people and stakeholders in democracy and city council services in a number of ways across a number of digital and more traditional channels.</p> <p>The city council’s Community Cohesion Strategy has been developed taking into account the views of young people and consultation with statutory, voluntary and community partners.</p>	<p>Corporate Communication Strategies Quarterly Priorities are agreed with Cabinet Leads, the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors (internal only)</p> <u>Community Cohesion Strategy 2020-2024</u> <u>No Platform for Extremism</u>

³ Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

<p>PB.4</p>	<p>The city council has an established customer feedback procedure which enables those in the City to engage with the organisation and offer ideas, suggestions, compliments and complaints. The Annual Customer Feedback Report for 2022/23 was published in January 2024 and shows a decrease compared to 2021/22 across most directorates in stage 1 corporate complaints. The number of stage 2 corporate complaints recorded has increased this year. The 2023/24 report is currently being produced.</p>	<p><u>Customer Feedback Procedure</u></p> <p><u>Customer Service Strategy 2021 - 2024</u></p> <p><u>Annual Customer Feedback Report 2023/2024</u></p>
<p>PB.5</p>	<p>The City Council Operating Plan for 2024/2025 was reported to the Cabinet in May 2024 on the delivery of the priorities and objectives of the Our City Our Wellbeing strategy.</p>	<p><u>Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy 2024-2028</u></p> <p><u>Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy Progress Report 2025</u></p> <p><u>Operating Plan 2024-2025</u></p> <p><u>Strategic Planning and Performance Framework</u></p>
<p>PB.6</p>	<p>The city council communicates through its website regarding the city council’s vision, achievements, financial position and performance. The website has recently been redeveloped to provide the public with easier access to information and services. Various parts of the organisation use a variety of social media, including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, google+, Pinterest and Flickr to engage and inform communities and stakeholders. The Communications Team also provides related media releases, where appropriate.</p>	<p><u>Facebook</u></p> <p>Our Week (internal document only)</p> <p>Our Learning (internal document only)</p> <p>Our Wellbeing (internal document only)</p> <p>Leisure Newsletter (internal document only)</p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

<p>PB.7</p>	<p>Engaging with our communities is essential to ensure that we are a resident led authority. Consultation exercises are carried out as required; for example, consultation on the Budget has become a regular component of the budget setting process. Consultation meetings were held across the Medium-term Financial Strategy period to consult on the budget proposals.</p> <p>The city council also conducted a number of online consultations in the year including the rights of way improvement plan; how do you use your chemist; elective home education policy, social workers survey to support carers and when would you like to shop at our markets.</p>	<p><u>Budget Consultation 2024-2025</u> <u>Budget Consultation 2024-2025 Feedback (Annex B)</u> <u>Budget Consultation book 2024-2025</u></p> <p><u>Budget Consultation Book 2025-2026</u></p>
<p>PB.8</p>	<p>Enhancing the accountability for service delivery and effectiveness of other public service providers is demonstrated through the reporting mechanisms for joint arrangements, such as the Health and Well Being Board, Adult Strategic Partnership, CYS Partnership, Responsible Authorities Group and the Youth Offending Service Board, - all of whom deliver services in partnership with Staffordshire PCT, Staffordshire Police, Probation Services and the city council.</p> <p>The city council works in close partnership with the other local authorities in Staffordshire forming the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub to develop investment and business growth across the region.</p> <p>The City Council signed the Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent COP (Celebration of the Possible) charter in January 2025 to affirm its dedication to creating a sustainable and equitable future for the area. The charter brings together communities, organisations, councils, academia and civil society, to create a shared vision of a happier, healthier future and charting a pathway to get there over the next 10 years, aligning existing projects and filling in any of the gaps.</p>	<p><u>Health and Wellbeing Board</u> <u>Place to Be - Adult Services Strategy 2023/2026</u> <u>Adults' Strategic Partnership Plan</u> <u>Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board</u> <u>SSASPB Annual Report 2023/2024</u> <u>Safeguarding Children Partnership Stoke-on-Trent</u> <u>Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023/2024</u></p> <p><u>Children's Safeguarding Partnership</u></p> <p><u>Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub</u> <u>Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent COP Charter (1)</u></p> <p><u>Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent COP Charter</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

PB.9	<p>Directors of Public Health in England have a statutory duty to produce an annual report outlining the health of their local population. The council is committed to improving the health of our city and reducing inequalities.</p>	<p><u>Director of Public Health Annual Report 2024</u></p>
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Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Principle C – Defining Outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PC.1	<p>In May 2024, the city council agreed the strategic vision for the coming period, 2024 - 2028. The new vision comprises six key themes and has been developed in consultation with Cabinet. The vision is the basis for a more detailed operating plan for 2024/25.</p>	<p><u>Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy 2024-2028</u> <u>Strategic Planning and Performance Framework Operating Plan 2024-2025</u> <u>Improvement and Productivity Plan 2023-2027 App 2</u> <u>Improvement and Productivity Plan 2023-2027 App 3</u> <u>Silicon Stoke Prospectus</u> <u>Library Strategy 2022/2025</u> <u>Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Strategy 2022/2028</u> <u>Visitor Economy Strategy 2022/2027</u> <u>Local Transport Plan 3 2011/2012 - 2025/2026</u> <u>Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan 2022-2031</u> <u>Collaborative Transport Vision and Joint Strategic Transport Statement</u> <u>Joint Strategic Transport Statement</u> <u>Local Transport Plan 2024/2025</u> <u>Local Transport Plan 2024-2025 Capital Programme Appendix 1</u> <u>Local Transport Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 App 1</u> <u>Stoke-on-Trent City Council Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

<p>PC.1</p>		<p><u>Green Space Strategy 2018-2033</u> <u>Stoke-on-Trent Green Space Strategy Interim Update May 2022</u> <u>Playing Pitch Strategy 2021/2040</u></p>
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Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

PC.2

The council's Our City Our Wellbeing strategy, sets out the council's ambition to generate a greater sense of wellbeing at individual, family, neighbourhood and city-wide levels. The key themes are as follows:

- Healthier
- Wealthier
- Safer
- Greener
- Cleaner
- Fairer

The council's Medium Term Financial Strategy has been aligned to support the delivery of the above strategic priorities.

[Strategic Planning and Performance Framework 2024-2028](#)

[Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025](#)
[Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App1](#)
[Performance and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App 2](#)

[Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)

[Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)

[Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)

[Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App1](#)
[Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2024/25 \(Appendix\)](#)

[Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2024/2025 Appendix A](#)
[Addendum \(Item 8\) to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/2025.pdf](#)

[Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025/2026](#)

[Addendum \(Item 15\) to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/2026 ✓](#)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

PC.3

The city council has adopted in full CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities and their Treasury Management Code of Practice. The city council receives specialist support from Arlingclose on all aspects of borrowing, lending and investments.

Reserves strategy and forecasts are clearly set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and are monitored through the quarterly Finance updates. Opportunities for strengthening the reserves position are routinely considered as part of the account closure exercise. The revenue budget is set and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

[Capital Financial Strategy 2024/2025](#)

[Capital Investment Programme Funding 2024/2025 - Annex N](#)

[Summary Capital Investment Programme 2024/2025-2034/2035](#)

[Capital Investment Programme - HDG Annex Mi](#)
[Capital Investment Programme - CAFS Annex Mii](#)
[Capital Investment Programme - ASCHIW Annex Miii](#)

[Capital Investment Programme - PH Annex Miv](#)
[Capital Investment Programme - STAR Annex Mv](#)
[Capital Investment Programme - CD Annex MI](#)
[Prudential Indicators 2024/2025 - 2033/2034 Annex O](#)

[Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex G](#)
[Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex Gi](#)
[Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex Gii](#)

[Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2024/25 \(Appendix\)](#)

[Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2024/2025 Appendix A](#)

[Addendum \(Item 8\) to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/2025.pdf](#)

[Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025/2026](#)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

		<p><u>Addendum (Item 15) to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/2026</u></p> <p><u>CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice 2024/2025</u></p>
<p>PC.4</p>	<p>The annual report on the Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24, incorporating the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement, Investment Strategy and Prudential and Treasury Indicators required under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2003 was approved by city council in February 2023 (having been considered by the Audit and Standards Committee).</p> <p>Member awareness and engagement on Treasury Management issues is progressed through development events and regular updates.</p>	<p><u>Treasury Management Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategy 2024/2025 & Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Treasury Management Policy Statement and Strategy 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Treasury Management and Policy Statement 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Annual Minimum Revenue (MRP) Policy Statement 2024/2025 - Annex P</u></p> <p><u>Prudential Indicators update 2024/25-2033/2034</u></p> <p><u>Economic and Interest Rate Forecast - Annex R</u></p> <p><u>Risk Register 2024/2025 - Annex S</u></p> <p><u>Reserves Position 2024/2025 - Annex T</u></p>
<p>PC.5</p>	<p>The council have produced an Asset Management Plan to set out the continuing work of Asset Maximisation and brings together the priorities for delivery for operational property, the accommodation strategies and plans and how the decisions taken to drive these also provide a greater level of opportunity for physical regeneration within the City.</p>	<p><u>Asset Management Plan 2022-2024</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PD.1	<p>Financial and non-financial performance reports are presented on a monthly basis at Senior Management Team Meetings (SMT) and taken to Cabinet each quarter.</p> <p>The content of the reports demonstrates the city council’s progress in achieving against the performance measures and budgets across city council activities and are used to highlight examples of excellence in service delivery, as well as monitoring areas requiring improvement. Reports are also provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committees for each respective service area.</p>	<p><u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex C</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex D</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex E</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex F</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex G</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex Gi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex Gii</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex H</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex I</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex J</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex K</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex C</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex D</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex E</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex F</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex G</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex Gi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex Gii</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex H</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex I</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex J</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex K</u></p> <p><u>Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2024/2025</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

The city council monitors a set of strategic measures to understand performance against our priorities. The Strategic Measures are reported to the Senior Management Team (SMT), Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny on a quarterly basis and are refreshed annually to ensure they remain up to date and relevant. SMT consider corporate health performance information on a monthly basis which includes customer feedback, sickness absence & HR data, health & safety and customer services information. Key Directorate KPIs are also reviewed on a monthly basis with a focus on a specific directorate each month. The city council continues to work with partners and reports performance on a quarterly basis to various boards including Health & Wellbeing Board and Children & Young Peoples Strategic Partnership Board.

[Financial Performance Report Q3 2024/2025](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex A](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex B](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex C](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex D](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex E](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex F](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Capital Investment Programme Changes](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Capital Investment HRO Annex Gi](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Cap Inv Prog Outturn Annex Gii](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex H](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 Annex I](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex J](#)
[Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex K](#)

[Financial Performance Report 2024-2025 Provisional Outturn](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Annex A General Fund Provisional Outturn Variances](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Annex B Analysis of Budget Variances](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Annex C Savings](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Strategic Contingency Annex D](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Dedicated Schools Grant Annex E](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 HRA Annex F](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 to 2033 - 2034 Cap Inv Prg Changes to CIP Annex G](#)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

The Our City, Our Wellbeing Strategic Planning and Performance Framework ensures that the Council's vision and priorities are translated into clear plans and measurable outcomes which are delivered by officers. It sets out corporate expectations for managing performance, which are complemented by related processes within individual Directorates and services. In some areas, particularly in Children's Services and Adult Social Care, there are additional national performance reporting requirements with defined collection and reporting methods through statutory returns.

[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 to 2033-2034 Cap Inv Prg Detail Annex Gi](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Cap Inv Prg FO Summary and Detail Annex Gii](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Summary of Reserves Annex H](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Summary of Income Collection Annex I](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Summary of Write Off Irrecoverable Debt Annex J](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Risk Register Annex K](#)

[Strategic Planning and Performance Framework 2024-2028](#)

[Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025](#)
[Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App1](#)
[Performance and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App 2](#)

[Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)
[Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)
[Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)
[Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App 1](#)

[Treasury Management Q3 Review 2024/2025](#)

[Overview & Scrutiny Committees](#)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

PD.2

In determining the courses of action to take decisions are informed by the city council's strategic priorities and objectives (its strategy and key performance indicators) which subsequently inform a clear planning methodology and long term direction for its business activities. To support this, the city council ensures it has an adequate and all-inclusive budget process.

Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2024/2025

Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2024/2025 Appendix A

Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025/2026

Addendum (Item 15) to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/2026

CIPFA External Assurance Review
CIPFA External Assurance Review Sept 2024

EFS Confirmation Letter 2023/2024 & 2024/2025

Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025
Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App1
Performance and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App 2

Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025
Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025
Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025
Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App1
Financial Resilience and Governance Update 2023

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

PD.3	<p>A Housing Strategy has been created to enhance Stoke-on-Trent’s housing offer so that people at all stages of life can find and live in a quality home they want at a price they can afford.</p> <p>Following a review of the complains procedure, a housing ombudsman complaint handling code has been developed.</p> <p>A tenant’s Charter and Service Standards has also been put into place.</p>	<p><u>Housing Strategy 2022-27</u></p> <p><u>Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy 2022/2027</u></p> <p><u>Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code</u></p> <p><u>Tenants Charter and Service Standards</u></p> <p><u>Tenants' Voice</u></p> <p><u>Council tenants news Stoke-on-Trent</u></p> <p><u>Registered Provider Charter Stoke-on-Trent</u></p>
PD.4	<p>“Making Stoke-on-Trent a digitally inclusive city”. Enabling more people to access the internet has the potential to transform the way in which citizens access local services and make choices about aspects of their own lives, while simultaneously reducing demand for key services.</p>	<p><u>Digital Strategy 2021-2024</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

<p>PD.5</p>	<p>Our vision is for Stoke-on-Trent to be a vibrant, healthy and caring city which supports its citizens to live more fulfilling, independent and healthy lives. Our objective is to promote personal responsibility, early intervention and independence by involving communities in the way our services are shaped. We will encourage community leadership, a strong focus on efficiency, value for money and ease of access to services.</p> <p>The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care System (ICS) introduced the All Age Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy 2025–2028. This outlines our shared vision across the ICS to enable compassionate, high-quality, personalised palliative and end of life care for patients of all ages. The document captures the evolving health and care landscape, including new approaches and innovations, as well as the implications of national policy and local developments.</p>	<p><u>Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2025</u></p> <p><u>Joint Dementia Strategy 2021-2024</u></p> <p><u>Young Peoples Learning and Skills Strategy 2022 - 2027</u></p> <p><u>Joint Commissioning Strategy For SEND 2023/2028</u></p> <p><u>Youth Justice Annual Plan 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027</u></p> <p><u>SEND Strategy 2024 - 2028</u></p> <p><u>All-age Palliative and End of life Care Strategy 2025-2028</u></p>
<p>PD.6</p>	<p>A set of Equality Objectives for the city council for the period 2021-2024 have been developed.</p>	<p><u>Equality and Diversity Strategy 2022/2025</u></p> <p><u>Equality Objectives 2021-2024</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Principle E – Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence											
PE.1	The city council participates in multiple benchmarking exercises and uses the information for financial and service quality comparisons. Learning from other entities enables the city council to achieve value for money and best practice service delivery.	Benchmarking <u>Corporate Peer Review</u> <u>CIPFA External Assurance Review</u> <u>Financial Review Management Response - Financial Performance Q2 2022/2023 Annex E</u>											
PE.2	The city council has four statutory ⁴ posts with responsibility for governance.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="1395 667 1742 815">Statutory / Mandatory posts</th> <th data-bbox="1753 667 2139 815">Post within current structure</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="1395 815 1742 890">Head of Paid Service</td> <td data-bbox="1753 815 2139 890">Chief Executive</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1395 890 1742 1038">Chief Financial Officer and s151 Officer</td> <td data-bbox="1753 890 2139 1038">Corporate Director of Resources</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1395 1038 1742 1187">Monitoring Officer</td> <td data-bbox="1753 1038 2139 1187">Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="1395 1187 1742 1367">Senior Information Risk Owner</td> <td data-bbox="1753 1187 2139 1367">Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Statutory / Mandatory posts	Post within current structure	Head of Paid Service	Chief Executive	Chief Financial Officer and s151 Officer	Corporate Director of Resources	Monitoring Officer	Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services	Senior Information Risk Owner	Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services
		Statutory / Mandatory posts	Post within current structure										
		Head of Paid Service	Chief Executive										
		Chief Financial Officer and s151 Officer	Corporate Director of Resources										
		Monitoring Officer	Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services										
Senior Information Risk Owner	Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services												
Head of Paid Service	Chief Executive												
Chief Financial Officer and s151 Officer	Corporate Director of Resources												
Monitoring Officer	Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services												
Senior Information Risk Owner	Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services												

⁴ There are other statutory roles, including the Director of Children’s Services and the Caldicott Guardian, currently held by the Director of All Age Commissioning

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

<p>PE.3</p>	<p>The Constitution sets out a Scheme of Delegation, Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules.</p> <p>The Scheme of Delegation gives officers authority to act within the policies and objectives defined by the executive and the city council as a whole. The scheme has been extended to Directors and work continues to extend further to Heads of service. The Financial Regulations underpin the effective management of the city council’s financial arrangements and the Contract Procedure Rules govern the making of contracts for and on behalf of the city council.</p> <p>The city council's Constitution sets out the framework for decision making and the formal reporting of those decisions. Decision making is underpinned by a framework of policies, plans and strategies. These are referred to as the Budget and Policy Framework and are identified within the Constitution. The Constitution is kept under review by the Director – Legal, Governance and Customer Services (the city council's Monitoring Officer).</p> <p>These documents are comprehensively reviewed on a regular basis by the Constitution Working Group with amendments being approved by full city council.</p>	<p><u>Constitution</u></p>	
<p>PE.4</p>	<p>For our elected Members, the city council produces an annual Learning and Development Plan supported by a calendar of training events and workshops. These continued to adhere to the best practice guidelines given in the Local Government Association’s Member Development Charter.</p>	<p>Councillor Induction Plan 2023-2027 (Internal only) <u>Role of a Councillor</u></p>	

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<p>PE.5</p>	<p>In compliance with the data transparency code, the city council has published its senior management structure and pay structure.</p> <p>The city council publishes an annual pay policy, last approved by city council in March 2024.</p> <p>Information is also provided about member’s remuneration.</p>	<p><u>Pay Policy Statement 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Pay Policy Statement 2025/2026</u></p> <p><u>Members Allowances 2024/2025</u></p>
<p>PE.6</p>	<p>The city council recognises that its employees are central to its success. Training for staff is developed via information from annual P.L.A.N - Progress, Learning, Actions, Nurture. The employee performance framework exists to promote performance and identify development needs. A revised performance appraisal process is currently being developed.</p> <p>Staff also undertake a range of compulsory e-learning on topics such as health and safety and data protection.</p> <p>Regular senior leadership events took place throughout 2023/24. These events are led by the Chief Executive for all Senior Managers and included a variety of management tops and information sharing.</p>	<p>P.L.A.N – Progress, Learning, Actions, Nurture</p> <p>E-learning Programme</p> <p>Senior Leadership Management Programme</p>

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PE.7	<p>On 16 December, the Government published its Devolution White Paper. This aims to simplify and streamline local government while devolving more power from Whitehall. In Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire there are ten councils – the county council, city council and eight district and borough councils. The Leaders of all these councils are part of the Staffordshire Leaders Board. A joint interim plan, signed by nine of the ten councils, was submitted to Government on 21 March 2025, in accordance with the deadline set, which outlines the two current options and expresses a commitment to work together to use best endeavours to secure a common position and presentation of a proposal by the next deadline in November 2025.</p>	<p><u>Response to the Requirements of the English Devolution White Paper</u></p>
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Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PF.1	<p>The Management of Risk Policy sets out the city council’s strategy for ensuring that effective risk management is embedded within all areas of the city council’s operations. It also requires that all managers and Councillors address the issue of associated risk whilst making any and all policy decisions. The Audit and Standards Committee reviews the Strategic Risk Register annually.</p> <p>The system of internal control is designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the city council’s policies, aims and objectives and to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.</p>	<p><u>Strategic Risk Register April 2025</u></p> <p><u>Management of Risk Policy</u></p> <p><u>Risk Management Health Check</u></p>

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PF.2

The city council's Financial Management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016). Information on the financial performance of the city council provided to budget managers and senior officers is well presented, timely, complete and accurate. Real time desk top budget information is available to budget holders across the city council.

- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex A](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex B](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex C](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex D](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex E](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex F](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex G](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex Gi](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex Gii](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex H](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex I](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex J](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2024/2025 Annex K](#)

- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex A](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex B](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex C](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex D](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex E](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex F](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex G](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex Gi](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex Gii](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex H](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex I](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex J](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2024/2025 Annex K](#)

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	<p><u>Financial Performance Report Q3 2024/2025</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex C</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex D</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex E</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex F</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Capital Investment Programme Changes</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Capital Investment Annex Gi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Cap Inv Prog Outturn Annex Gii</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex H</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 Annex I</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex J</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2024/2025 Annex K</u></p> <p><u>Financial Performance Report 2024-2025 Provisional Outturn</u> <u>Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Annex A</u> <u>General Fund Provisional Outturn Variances</u> <u>Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Annex B</u> <u>Analysis of Budget Variances</u> <u>Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Annex C</u> <u>Savings</u> <u>Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Strategic Contingency Annex D</u> <u>Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Dedicated Schools Grant Annex E</u> <u>Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 HRA Annex F</u></p>
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The Our City, Our Wellbeing Strategic Planning and Performance Framework ensures that the Council's vision and priorities are translated into clear plans and measurable outcomes which are delivered by officers. It sets out corporate expectations for managing performance, which are complemented by related processes within individual Directorates and services. In some areas, particularly in Children's Services and Adult Social Care, there are additional national performance reporting requirements with defined collection and reporting methods through statutory returns.

[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 to 2033 - 2034 Cap Inv Prg Changes to CIP Annex G](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 to 2033-2034 Cap Inv Prg Detail Annex Gi](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Cap Inv Prg FO Summary and Detail Annex Gii](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Summary of Reserves Annex H](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Summary of Income Collection Annex I](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Summary of Write Off Irrecoverable Debt Annex J](#)
[Financial Performance Q4 2024-2025 Risk Register Annex K](#)

[Strategic Planning and Performance Framework 2024-2028](#)

[Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025](#)

[Performance Measures and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App1](#)
[Performance and Targets 2024/2025 Q1 App 2](#)

[Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q1 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)
[Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q2 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)
[Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025](#)
[Corporate Measures Q3 2024/2025 Appendix 1](#)
[Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App1](#)
[Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/2024 and Quarter 1 2024/2025 Performance Summary](#)

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		<p><u>Treasury Management Annual Report 2023/2024 and Quarter 1 2024/2025 Appendix 1</u></p> <p><u>Addendum to Agenda Item 5 Treasury Management Annual Report 2023-2024 and Quarter 1 2024-2025</u></p>
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<p>PF.3</p>	<p>The city council’s policies and staff training programme promote compliance with information legislation. To support this, data protection courses have been further updated for both officers and councillors. Training for senior managers is complete and relevant policies are in place in line with current legislation. We comply with standards for public sector data handling and security and have achieved Public Services Network certification every year since its launch. The city council has met the standards required by the new NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit.</p> <p>The city council is a signatory to the One Staffordshire county-wide information sharing protocol to ensure that when data is shared with our partners it is done in a transparent, compliant and consistent way.</p>	<p>Data Protection Policy (Internal only)</p> <p>Data Sharing Policy (Internal only)</p> <p>Information Governance Policy (Internal only)</p>
<p>PF.4</p>	<p>The city council’s review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directorate assurance based on management information, performance information, officer assurance statements and Scrutiny reports • The work undertaken by Internal Audit during the year. • The work undertaken by the External Auditor reported in their annual audit and inspection letter. • Other work undertaken by independent inspection bodies. 	<p><u>Internal Audit Q1 Monitoring Report 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Monitoring Half Year Monitoring Report 24/25</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Monitoring Q3 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/2025</u> <u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2024-2025 Appendix</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/2024</u> <u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/2024 App 2 EQA</u></p> <p><u>External Review of Internal Audit March 2023</u> <u>External Review of Internal Audit Appendix</u></p>

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PF.5

The city council has a Corporate Strategy for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption. A key area of work continues to be Housing Tenancy Fraud and in particular Right to Buy where the implementation of enhanced due diligence checks and robust anti-money laundering controls have been hugely successful in preventing non bona fide Right to Buy applications thereby protecting the public purse. Results of fraud investigations are publicised on the internet using the city council's social media presence and also in the local media to promote the city council's 'Zero Tolerance Against Fraud' approach.

The city council participates in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI), this is a range of annual and biennial data matching exercises led by the Cabinet Office that matches electronic data within and between public and private sector bodies to prevent and detect fraud. Regular updates on these exercises are provided to the Audit and Standards Committee.

[Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption & Error Strategy April 2024](#)

[Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption & Error April 2025](#)

[Counter Fraud Half Year Update 2024-2025](#)

[Corporate Fraud Overview 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025](#)

National Fraud Initiative

[Staffordshire Counter Fraud Partnership](#)

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Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PG.1	<p>In line with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, the city council is required to publish certain types of information for transparency purposes, this information can be found on the city council’s website along with monthly Transparency Reports.</p> <p>A record of executive decisions made under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 are published on the city council’s website. Information is also provided about member’s remuneration.</p>	<p><u>Transparency Reports 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Members Allowances 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Notice of Decisions</u></p>
PG.2	<p>The city council operates a number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees that consist of Elected Members who undertake annual work programmes. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees are aligned to the directorates within the city council. Their two main functions are to hold decision makers to account and to also develop and review policy.</p>	<p><u>Overview & Scrutiny</u></p>

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<p>PG.3</p>	<p>The Statement of Accounts is published and produced in compliance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 presenting a true and fair view of the financial performance of the city council in the delivery of services to the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent. The accounts are subject to independent external audit and are made available via the city council’s website. This is seen as an essential feature of public accountability and stewardship as it provides an annual report on how the city council has used the public funds for which it is responsible.</p>	<p><u>Statement of Accounts 2023/2024</u></p> <p><u>Statement of Accounts Appendix B revised balance sheet</u></p> <p><u>Draft Statement of Accounts 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Accounting Policies Adopted for 2024/2025 Statement of Accounts</u></p> <p><u>Updated Accounting Policies adopted for Statement of Accounts 2024-2025</u></p> <p><u>Addendum Accounting policies adopted for 2024-2025 Statement of Accounts</u></p>
<p>PG.4</p>	<p>The Audit and Standards Committee has responsibility for conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the governance framework, including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness will be informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> City council officers, responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment <input type="checkbox"/> The Head of Audit and Fraud’s annual report <input type="checkbox"/> Comments and observations made by external auditors and external review agencies and inspectors. <p>The Committee also report on their activities to full council.</p>	<p><u>Roles and Responsibilities</u></p> <p><u>Roles and Responsibilities - Appendix A</u></p> <p><u>Audit and Standards Committee Annual Report 2024/2025</u></p>

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PG.5

The city council’s assurance arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the role of the Head of Internal Audit (2020). Information on the work of Internal Audit is provided to managers and senior officers and is well presented, complete and accurate. Summary reports are provided to the Audit and Standards Committee on a quarterly basis.

The annual report of the Head of Audit and Fraud summarises the audit work undertaken during 2023/2024. Where recommendations have been made to improve processes, these are being addressed by appropriate officers. From the work undertaken in 2023/2024 by Internal Audit, the Head of Audit and Fraud was able to give the following assurance:

“From the work carried out by Internal Audit during 2023/24, it has been concluded that the level of assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the city council’s control environment is Satisfactory.”

[Internal Audit Charter 2024/2025](#)
[Internal Audit Charter 2025/2026](#)

[Internal Audit Strategy and Plan 2024/2025](#)
[Internal Audit Strategy and Plan 2025/2026](#)
[Appendix 1](#)

[Annual Audit and Standards Committee Plan 2024](#)
[Annual Audit and Standards Committee Plan 2025](#)
[Annual Audit and Standards Committee Plan 2025/2026](#)

[Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/2025](#)
[Internal Audit Annual Report 2024-2025 Appendix](#)

