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Stoke-on-Trent City Council Governance Statement 2025/26

1. Introduction

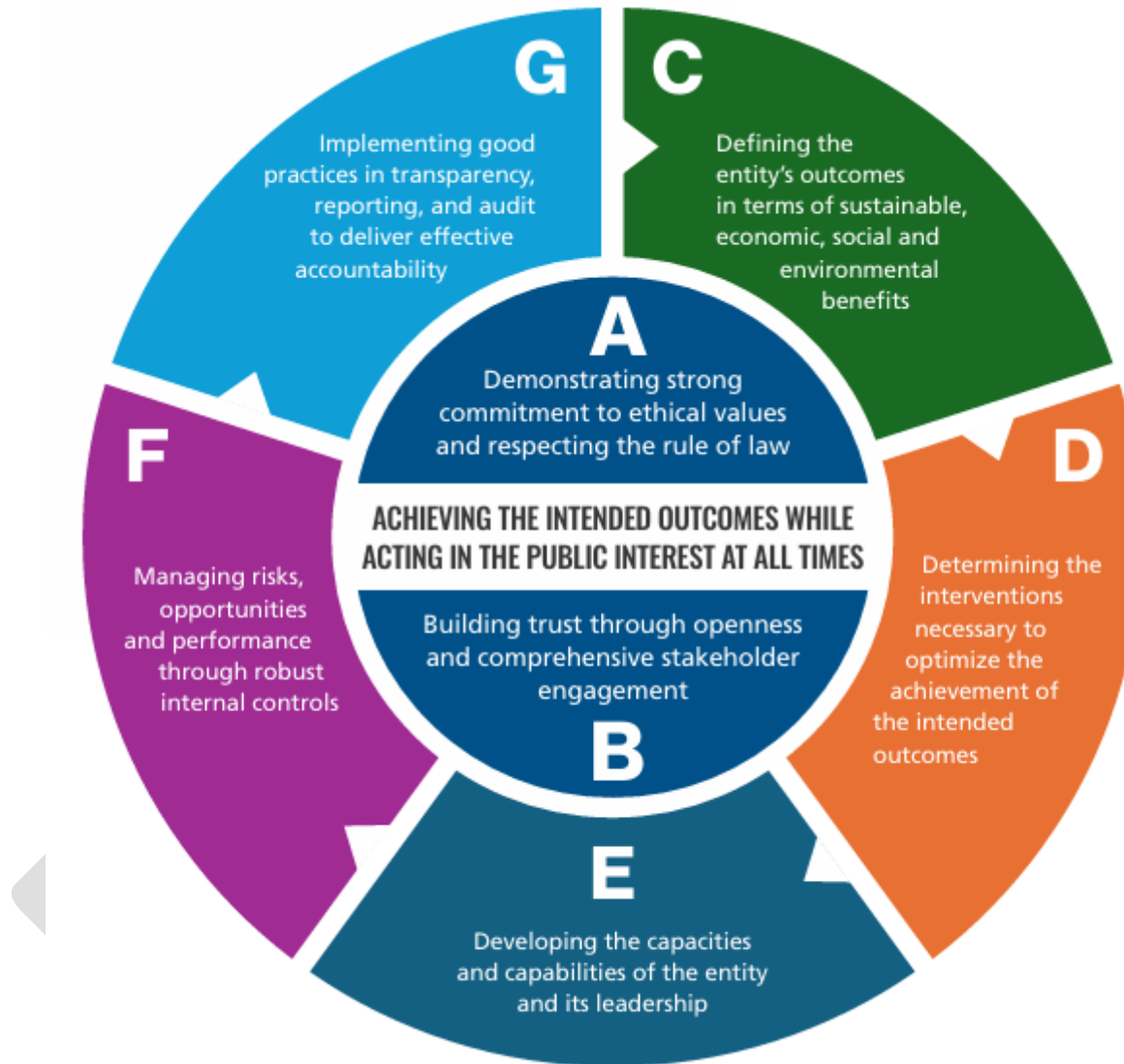
- 1.1 Each year the city council produces a governance statement that explains how it makes decisions, manages its resources and promotes values and high standards of conduct and behaviour. This statement complies with regulation 6(2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 1.2 Stoke-on-Trent City 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 2 years' time (should local government reorganisation not take place), until then amendments will be made on a frequent basis as constitutional updates.
- 1.7 The appendix provides internet links which will take you to the specific supporting documents and appropriate web pages.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26



International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2026) (the 'International Framework')

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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](#)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

3. The 2025/26 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 2026 and is considered up to June 2026. 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 subsequently approved by full council. 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 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: 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.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 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.

- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 The City Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025/26 was approved by City Council on 4 March 2025 and continued to reflect the significant financial challenges facing both Stoke-on-Trent and the wider local government sector. Ongoing pressures arising from inflation, increasing demand for statutory services and continuing market pressures within social care continue to place substantial strain on the council's financial position. The most significant financial pressures relate to Adults' and Children's Social Care, where increasing complexity of need, rising placement costs and sustained demand have created a level of expenditure that remains financially unsustainable without further transformation and intervention.
- 3.8 During 2024/25 and 2025/26 the city council received Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from Government, enabling the authority to set balanced budgets whilst implementing a longer-term recovery and sustainability programme. The support provided the council with short term financial stability through the use of capitalisation measures and/or temporary borrowing arrangements. Whilst this support has enabled the council to manage immediate financial pressures, it also reduces financial flexibility in future years and cannot be viewed as a sustainable long-term solution to the underlying financial challenges.
- 3.9 The city council's EFS application was supported by a credible resource and transformation plan focused primarily on reducing demand and expenditure within Children's Social Care through investment in early intervention, prevention and sufficiency arrangements. Progress has continued during 2025/26, with an ongoing focus on reducing the number and cost of high-cost residential placements, strengthening foster care provision and improving commissioning arrangements.
- 3.10 The city council achieved a balanced provisional outturn against budget position in 2025/26, through the use of one off items and earmarked financial resources, supported by strengthened financial controls, effective budget management, and a continued organisational focus on long-term financial sustainability. Despite this achievement, significant financial challenges remain over the medium term, with the Council continuing to face substantial funding pressures and projected budget gaps in future years, notwithstanding the increased certainty arising from the Fair Funding Review and the multi-year Local Government Finance Settlement.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 3.11 During 2025/26, Children and Families Directorate overspent by £16.7 million largely due to the continued demand and placement costs relating to Children's Social Care with continues to present a significant challenge to the local authority. In addition, the Adult Social Care and All Age Commissioning Directorate were also in an overspend position due to sustained demand pressures, alongside rising unit costs for social care placements, particularly within residential and nursing care settings. These pressures were driven in part by a reduction in the number of individuals assessed as eligible for Funded Nursing Care following hospital discharge, together with an increase in unsuccessful Continuing Healthcare assessments. As a result, demand for local authority funded care has increased, contributing to ongoing capacity constraints within the care market and placing additional cost pressures on placement budgets. These significant pressures were offset in year by several one-off mitigations including directorate underspends elsewhere within the council, corporate mitigations and lower capital financing costs.
- 3.12 The council recognises that financial risks cannot be deferred, and that immediate and sustained transformational activity is required to address structural budget pressures and improve long term financial sustainability. Whilst Children's and Adults' Social Care remain the most significant financial risks, the council continues to review expenditure, operating models and efficiency opportunities across all service areas. The transformation programme continues to focus on key areas including demand reduction within Children's Social Care, improved commissioning and contract management, agency reduction, digital transformation and optimisation of the council's asset base.
- 3.13 As part of the EFS process, the council was subject to independent external assurance reviews undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), including reviews completed during December 2023 and September 2024. These reviews concluded that, whilst there were opportunities for operational improvement, the city council had robust financial management arrangements in place and had taken (or was taking) all material steps expected in response to the financial challenges faced. The reviews recognised that the principal driver of the council's financial position was the exceptional demand and cost pressures within Children's Social Care. The September 2024 review also recognised the progress made by the authority in strengthening financial management and governance arrangements.
- 3.14 Whilst the Section 151 Officer is not currently minded to issue a Section 114 notice, this position remains contingent upon the successful delivery of the council's financial recovery, transformation and savings programmes and together with the continued effective management of emerging financial pressures. The Council also continues to engage proactively with Government regarding the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) process and the longer term sustainability of local government funding. Failure to deliver the required pace of transformation, achieve planned reductions in demand led expenditure, secure ongoing support through the EFS framework where required, or realise the benefits of future funding reforms would significantly increase the council's financial risk and challenge its medium term financial resilience.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 through the agreed annual assurance process
- Reviews of partnership governance arrangements
- 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 play 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 receive regular training to ensure it has the appropriate knowledge and skills and have undertaken 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, with a further assessment planned for 2026. This demonstrated the Committee fully complies in over 77% of all areas, with a total score of 170 out of a possible 200.

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 January 2024, the International Internal Auditing Standards Board issued new Global Internal Audit Standards, with implementation required from 1st April 2025. These standards guide the worldwide professional practice of internal auditing and serve as a basis for evaluating and elevating the quality of the internal audit function. An opportunity has been taken to review and further develop the council's approach to internal audit, including a gap analysis against the new global standards. An action plan has been produced to address these, and progress will be reported to the Audit and Standards Committee on a regular basis. An external review of internal audit was last undertaken in November 2022, with a further review planned for 2027. This gave the city council's internal audit service the highest category of "Generally Conforms" to the requirements of the previous Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and those of the Local Government Application Note for the second time.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 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. 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 2025/26 including funding of external delivery partnerships and programmes; officers decision making; declarations of interests and gifts and hospitality; and residential care homes fees consultation.
- 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 were appointed by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA [1]) as the City Council's external auditor from 2023/24 for a five-year period. Their annual work programme is delivered in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice issued by the National Audit Office and includes both nationally prescribed and locally determined responsibilities. City council officers work closely with the external auditor to provide timely information and supporting evidence, and to respond to findings and implement recommendations arising from the audit.
- 4.10 The external auditor issued a completion report for the 2024/25 financial year to the Audit & Standards Committee on 18 February 2026. Following this, management made adjustments to the Statement of Accounts, resulting in a final version being presented to the Committee in April 2026. External audit confirmed that these amendments did not change the conclusions set out in their February report and that they would issue a disclaimer of opinion. A disclaimer indicates that the auditor was unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to form an opinion and, therefore, no assurance is provided on the financial statements. The Accounts

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2024 introduced a statutory backstop date requiring publication of audited local authority accounts for 2024/25 by 27 February 2026. This deadline was not met. In response, the external auditor identified a number of areas for improvement, and the council has developed and is implementing an action plan to strengthen financial reporting processes, working papers, and audit readiness to support the timely delivery of future accounts.

- 4.11 As part of their Value for Money (VfM) conclusions, the external auditor identified a significant weakness in the council's financial sustainability arrangements relating to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit, reported at £22.4m as at 31 March 2025. Recommendations include strengthening medium-term financial planning ahead of the cessation of the statutory override in March 2028, monitoring the financial impact of the locality cluster funding model, and maintaining active engagement with the Department for Education. The auditors also reported that previously identified significant weaknesses remain, including reliance on Exceptional Financial Support and limitations in financial reporting capacity and timeliness. These matters, and the actions being taken to address them, are set out in the following paragraphs.

External Inspections

- 4.12 The city council is subject to a number of inspections by regulatory bodies on many of the services that it provides. During 2025/26 the following inspections were undertaken:
- 4.13 In 2025 Adult Social Care and All Age Commissioning welcomed the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance process that examined 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."
- 4.14 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 (Performance Information Request) review December 2025

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- Marrow House – Last inspection Aug 2019 – CQC Rating Good latest PIR review July 2025
- Enablement service – Last inspection June 2018 – CQC Rating Good latest PIR review July 2025
- School Street – Last inspection October 2025 – CQC Rating Good latest PIR review March 2026
- Shared Lives – no inspection has taken place since registration in May 2019 therefore no rating, however last PIR reviewed October 2024 (expected PIR June 2026)

- 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.
- 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 An inspection of children's services was conducted by Ofsted between 12 and 23 May 2025. The review looked at the impact of leaders on social work practice; the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; children in care and care leavers. The outcome was 'requires improvement to be good' overall, recognising the experience and progress of children in care to be 'good'. 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 and is overseen by the Children's Improvement Board.
- 4.19 Oversight of the delivery of the continuous improvement plan is owned by the Stoke-on-Trent Children's Improvement Board. This Board which is Independently chaired regularly reviews progress against this plan, monitoring progress and responding to barriers or areas of concern, as well as tracking quality assurance, performance targets and outcomes for children and families. The Board stay's alert to sector and national developments and respond accordingly in adapting this plan.
- 4.20 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 all rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. Registered managers of the homes prepare action plans in response to inspection feedback, and these action plans are progressed and monitored.
- 4.21 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

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

managed the delivery teams. As part of the improvement plan the two parts have been brought together and now wholly sit within CAFS.

- 4.22 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.
- 4.23 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.
- 4.24 In direct partnership with health colleagues, we have responded to the actions through a refreshed improvement plan. Underneath the SEND Delivery Group there are 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, which then reports into the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board.
- 4.25 There is a collective commitment across our partnerships for a relational 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. 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 working and ownership in areas such as mental health, children and young people and learning disability and autism, allowing for a whole system view.
- 4.26 Oversight of the delivery of the SEND and AP improvement plan is owned by the Stoke-on-Trent SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board. 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.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 4.27 Progress is further monitored through formal six-monthly review meetings with the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England. At the 18-month review in November 2025, significant progress was recognised across all identified areas for improvement. Further reviews are scheduled throughout 2026/27.
- 4.28 Progress will also be reported regularly to Cabinet Members Briefing (CMB) and Oversight and Scrutiny Committee 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. was notified on 3rd February 2026 by the Regulator of Social Housing that it was to be subject to routine inspection on 15-17th April.
- 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. Following formal notification of inspection on 3rd February 2026 an interdepartmental working group was set up to meet on a weekly basis to discuss inspection preparation and to gather the pre-inspection documentation evidence request which was notified by the Regulator on 23rd February 2026 and returned by the specified deadline of 9th March 2026.
- 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 Inclusion and adherence to the existing governance framework outlined in 4.30 was embedded and achieved for the service through 2025/26. A Quality Assurance plan and transition team ensured that the necessary due diligence, novation of contracts and TUPE transfer of Staff and supply chains successfully transferred to the council on the 1st April 2025. Worked continued throughout 2025/26 to finalise the accounts and close down Unitas has a company. The council have successfully trained and Inducted staff, integrated management structures, policies, procedures and operating systems. A transformation plan is being developed to drive further efficiencies and improvements in organisational development and culture, operating systems, performance framework and improving services to tenants.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

4.32 The outcome of the city council's assessment of its governance arrangements in 2025/26 is summarised below. A more detailed assessment against the seven CIPFA/IFAC principles is set out in **Appendix 1**.

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 2025/26 approved by Cabinet in May 2025. 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 is underpinned by a set of carefully chosen performance indicators which are 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.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 5.4 The Corporate Strategy 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.
 - Stewardship: taking ownership of our responsibilities to residents and businesses.
 - Representation: championing our city and fostering civic pride.
- 5.5 The 2025/26 Operating Plan included a focus on developing place-based governance mechanisms to strengthen partnership working and harness a broader range of viewpoints and organisations to address complex challenges. The Future 100 Prospectus, launched in 2025, is an integrated plan to deliver sustainable growth and improved outcomes for Stoke-on-Trent, which showcases the city as a nationally important engine of creativity, innovation and growth. It invites the Government to partner with us to deliver crucial improvements and help to build a Stoke-on-Trent fit for the next 100 years. The Operating Plan also set out plans for further investment in digital transformation to support new, more effective ways of working across both Children and Family Services and Adult Social Care, as well as the Housing, Regeneration and Operations directorate. These also included introducing more streamlined back-office services across HR, Payroll and Finance to improve service integration and enable the implementation of more efficient, user-friendly processes.
- 5.6 The Operating Plan also focused on the need for significant investment in parts of the city which have experienced higher levels of deprivation and neglect over recent decades. It outlined a coherent set of regeneration projects and urban renewal initiatives aimed at breathing new life into deprived areas and contributing to improved life chances and living standards for residents. As well as referencing the City Centre regeneration plans for Etruscan Square, the Operating Plan also included details regarding the Stoke town High Street Accelerator programme (a government-funded pilot to improve the attractiveness of the high street, reduce empty shops and revitalise the town centre), the Goods Yard heritage regeneration project, the continuing redevelopment of the historic Spode pottery site and improvements to the public realm in Longton, Tunstall and Burslem. Community renewal initiatives included the expansion of the Family Matters partnership programme, offering timely support to struggling families, the Strengthening Communities programme to address the lack of social capital and low levels of community empowerment in the most deprived neighbourhoods, and the Bus Service Improvement Programme to improve intra-city connectivity for all residents and communities and make public transport quicker, safer, and more reliable and affordable.
- 5.7 The Operating Plan also sought to address the financial challenges facing the city council and wider city, noting that the authority had begun to stabilise its financial position, but continued to face significant demand pressures and inflationary costs. It noted that the council has secured access to up to £16.8 million in Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from government to create the conditions for improved financial sustainability. Of this, £11 million was earmarked for Children's Social Care services in order to address the

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

increasing cost of, and demand for, care placements. £3 million was set aside to fund key service transformation programmes, and 2.8 million was used to offset interest costs linked to existing borrowing. The Plan noted that the council intended to repay all EFS borrowing over the medium-term using its pipeline of capital receipts generated through the disposal of land and property assets, as well as efficiency savings resulting from transformation programmes.

5.8 During 2025/26 the city council approved a suite of strategies designed to support delivery of its corporate priorities. These included:

- Stoke-on-Trent Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2025-28)
- Stoke-on-Trent Housing Delivery Action Plan
- Playing Pitch Strategy (2021-40 – Update)
- Joint All Age Carers Strategy
- Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Stoke-on-Trent Dementia Strategy (2025-29)
- Independent Living Strategy (2025-33)
- Youth Justice Plan
- Adult Social Care Improvement Plan
- Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Digital Strategy
- Smoke-free Stoke-on-Trent: Tobacco Control Strategy (2025–30)
- Future 100 City Prospectus “Shaping Our City: Growth for All”
- Local Government Reorganisation proposal for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire
- Community Cohesion Strategy (2026-30)
- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy
- Family Matters - Stoke-on-Trent Children, Young People and Families Strategy (2026-30)
- Local Air Quality Strategy
- Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy
- Improving Education Strategy 2025-2030
- Youth Strategy
- 2026-29 Local Transport Settlement and Local Transport Delivery Plan

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.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Team Plans

- 5.9 In April 2026, annual 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 2025/26 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.

Performance Reporting

- 5.10 The Corporate Strategy includes a 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.
- 5.11 The 2025/26 year has seen a continued focus on strengthening the council's performance management arrangements, the corporate measures were refreshed to ensure they remain relevant and current. In addition, February 2026 saw the formal release of the national Local Outcomes Framework (LOF) measures. The council is currently reviewing these new measures and working to incorporate them into our performance management framework and reporting arrangements. This will ensure our approach remains aligned with national standards and supports robust, transparent reporting for the years ahead.

Analytics

- 5.12 During 2025/26 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. The vision for analytics and digital transformation is to build resilience in customer contact channels, strengthen digital engagement, and ensure robust demand management. This approach has informed targeted recruitment, upskilling of staff, and the ongoing development of resilient online services. Looking ahead, the council is committed to finalising the business case for in-house roles to deliver the data strategy, commencing procurement for technical execution, and continuing to support priority projects with analytical insight. The ambition remains to embed analytics and AI at the heart of service improvement and strategic decision making.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 5.13 In addition, the council has progressed a number of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation pilots to support service delivery and improve organisational efficiency. This has included the deployment of targeted pilots across key service areas, focusing on reducing administrative burden, improving data quality and enhancing the timeliness of decision making. In parallel, work has been undertaken to explore the use of AI within customer services, including voice automation and digital front door solutions, with the aim of improving accessibility, increasing channel shift and strengthening the council's ability to manage demand. A structured approach has been adopted to the development and evaluation of these pilots, enabling the council to assess benefits, risks and wider applicability prior to any scale-up.

Digital and Data Programme

- 5.14 The Digital and Data Programme supports the delivery of the council's wider transformation priorities by improving how data and digital technologies are used to support decision-making, service delivery and financial management, and to streamline and enhance processes. Activity has focused on strengthening data governance and improving data quality, alongside piloting and implementing digital solutions, including artificial intelligence, to reduce manual processes and administrative burden.
- 5.15 Governance arrangements are in place to oversee delivery, with the Digital and Data Board providing monthly oversight of all digital and data projects, system changes and emerging AI pilots, acting as a control point for the approval of major system changes and AI use cases, and monitoring performance, risks and benefits realisation. This is supported by strategic oversight from the Transformation Board on a six-weekly basis, ensuring that activity is aligned to corporate priorities and delivery remains on track.
- 5.16 The council is in the process of engaging a delivery partner to explore the use of artificial intelligence to review processes and systems, identifying opportunities to improve efficiency and service delivery. In parallel, the council is engaging a data partner to support delivery of the data strategy and roadmap. Progress to date includes the development of a draft data strategy, early-stage AI pilots, the continued development and implementation of key systems (including IDOX and the RMS system), and the successful implementation and go-live of the Councillor Casework system. Development of a new ERP system is also underway to modernise core business processes and improve integration across services and systems, including HR and Finance.

Transformation Programme

- 5.17 The Transformation Programme supports the delivery of the council's wider strategic and financial priorities by driving service improvement, efficiency and financial sustainability. Activity is focused on key budget prioritisation areas including overtime and agency spend, asset rationalisation, procurement, digital and data, Children and Families sufficiency, and Adult Social Care, with a clear emphasis on reducing cost, improving outcomes and delivering sustainable change across services.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 5.18 Governance arrangements are in place to oversee delivery, with the Transformation Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, providing six-weekly oversight of all transformation projects and programmes through a portfolio management approach. This includes reviewing progress, budget and risks, prioritising activity in line with corporate priorities, and ensuring that resources are aligned to deliver key outcomes. The Board monitors performance and benefits realisation, and acts as an escalation point to remove barriers and support delivery where required.
- 5.19 Progress to date includes the establishment of programme governance, defined ownership and accountability across all priority areas, the development of delivery plans aligned to savings targets, and the introduction of mechanisms to identify, track and evaluate financial and non-financial benefits. Delivery is supported by a structured programme approach, enabling improved visibility of progress, supporting continuous improvement, and ensuring timely intervention where performance is off track.

Management of Risk Arrangements

- 5.20 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, Culture and Heritage (Monitoring Officer) are the joint senior leads for the management of risk. The current Management of Risk Policy, which is reviewed on an annual basis, was approved by Cabinet in March 2026 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."
- 5.21 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. The strategic risk register, as at the end of the year, listed 22 strategic risks which reflected the potential challenges that faced the city council and retained a clear strategic focus for the risk profile. 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.
- 5.22 During 2025/2026 the city council continued to develop and embed its approach for the management of risk. As part of this the media and formats used to present information on risks, and its management were reviewed. Consequently, the format of the strategic risk register was updated to ensure it remained focused on the city council's corporate priorities; the risks associated with them and the actions in place, and which were being developed, to manage them. Notwithstanding this progress, work continues to further develop the media, framework and efficacy with which risks, and its management, are reviewed and reported.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 5.23 Training and guidance on the management of risk continues to be developed. An e-learning module for the Management of Risk forms part of the Authority's Learning Development suite of e-courses and refresher sessions on the management of risk continue to be available for managers. These are supported by "Quick Guides", which were developed during 2025/2026 to enable officers to readily access and reference good practice regarding the management of risk.

Financial Controls & Financial Resilience

- 5.24 The city council continues to operate within an extremely challenging financial environment. National economic conditions sustained inflationary pressures and increasing demand for statutory services continue to impact significantly on the council's financial resilience. These pressures are particularly acute within Children's and Adults' Social Care, SEND and homelessness services, where both demand levels and market costs remain high.
- 5.25 The council recognises that maintaining robust financial controls and effective financial governance arrangements is essential in managing these pressures and protecting financial sustainability. During 2025/26 the council has continued to strengthen and embed its financial control framework across all services, with a clear organisational focus on accountability, budget ownership and value for money.
- 5.26 Key measures implemented and maintained during the year include:
- rigorous challenge and scrutiny of all non-essential expenditure;
 - strengthened budget monitoring and forecasting arrangements;
 - enhanced oversight of demand led budgets, particularly within social care;
 - ongoing review of workforce structures and vacancy management;
 - strengthened procurement and commissioning controls through the Central Buying Team (CBiT);
 - increased financial management training and support for managers and budget holders;
 - enhanced governance arrangements through officer boards and working groups focused on financial sustainability and transformation activity.
- 5.27 The authority continues to maintain a comprehensive framework of governance and financial oversight arrangements, including Finance Committee (was Financial Sustainability Working Group), Transformation Board, Establishment Board, Commercial Board, Capital and Asset Management Board and Commissioning and Contract Management Board. These arrangements support robust challenge, risk management and delivery oversight across the authority's key financial and transformational programmes.
- 5.28 The Capital Programme and Asset Management Board (CPAM), chaired by the Corporate Director of Housing, Regeneration and Operations and attended by representatives from finance, project management and other relevant services, provides a strong

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

corporate governance mechanism for the Council's capital and asset management activity. The Board oversees the delivery of schemes against timescales and budgets, considers risk management, and operates as a gateway for new projects, helping to ensure that investment decisions are robust, transparent and aligned to corporate priorities. It also provides oversight of wider asset management matters, including Community Asset Transfers and condition surveys, while maintaining visibility of both the critical pipeline of known capital projects and longer-term ambitions. This supports effective planning, prioritisation and foresight, and is further strengthened by the Council's development of a long-term capital strategy, aligned with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, which will bring these arrangements together into a more coherent framework for sustainable decision-making and stewardship of resources.

- 5.29 The council continues to aim to maintain a minimum level of reserves equivalent to approximately 5% of the net revenue budget, recognising the importance of reserves in supporting financial resilience and managing financial risk. The authority has also continued to strengthen financial resilience through contributions to strategic reserves where possible and through the retention of capital receipts to support future debt repayment obligations associated with Exceptional Financial Support.
- 5.30 The council continues to monitor the affordability of borrowing and capital financing costs closely. Delivery of capital receipts remains important in supporting the reduction of borrowing associated with Exceptional Financial Support and reducing future revenue pressures.
- 5.31 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs deficit continues to represent a significant long term financial risk to the authority. Whilst the statutory override remains in place until March 2028 and the Government has announced a phased national support arrangement through the High Needs Stability Grant, the long-term sustainability of SEND funding remains uncertain pending further national reform. The council continues to develop its local SEND reform arrangements and monitor the financial implications closely through robust governance and programme oversight arrangements.
- 5.32 Nevertheless, the council continues to face significant medium term financial risks. These include continued volatility within social care demand, uncertainty regarding national funding reform, ongoing inflationary pressures and broader economic uncertainty. The council remains engaged in regular dialogue with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Department for Education (DfE) and wider sector partners regarding these challenges and the need for sustainable national solutions to local government funding pressures.

Financial Management Code

- 5.33 The city council continues to work towards full compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code, which provides the framework of standards and principles expected to support strong financial management and long-term financial sustainability within local authorities.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 5.34 The council's self-assessment against the FM Code indicates that it remains broadly compliant with the requirements of the Code. The assessment recognised the strength of the Council's governance arrangements, financial monitoring processes, MTFs development and financial reporting arrangements.
- 5.35 During 2025/26 further progress has been made in strengthening compliance with the FM Code and embedding good financial management practice across the council. This has included:
- further development of medium and long-term financial planning arrangements;
 - continued enhancement of scenario modelling and financial risk assessment;
 - strengthening financial training and awareness for managers and members;
 - ongoing review of financial regulations, procedures and internal controls;
 - continued embedding of robust budget accountability arrangements across services.
- 5.36 The implementation of the new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system also provides an opportunity to further strengthen financial management arrangements through improved financial reporting, standardisation of processes, enhanced data quality and greater organisational consistency in financial controls and governance. However, the council recognises the complexity of any ERP implementation, given the number of crucial functions and interfaces, and is undertaking periodic independent reviews to test progress and governance (see paras 5.41 to 5.42 below).
- 5.37 More generally, the council continues to consider learning from external reviews, sector best practice and national reports relating to financial governance and resilience in local government in order to further strengthen its financial management arrangements and organisational culture.

Strengthening the Finance Function

- 5.38 The city council recognises that maintaining a resilient, well-resourced and professionally skilled finance function is critical to supporting effective governance, financial sustainability and delivery of the MTFs. Continued work has therefore taken place during 2025/26 to strengthen the capacity, capability and resilience of the finance function. The council has continued to review the structure and operating model of the finance function to ensure it is appropriately aligned to the scale of the financial and transformational challenges facing the organisation. This has included targeted recruitment activity, workforce development and succession planning and ensuring opportunities exist for training and developing finance professionals.
- 5.39 The council has also continued to strengthen financial management culture across the organisation through enhanced engagement between finance staff and Directorate services, improved budget accountability arrangements and financial management training for managers and budget holders. Whilst recruitment and retention challenges for qualified finance professionals continue to affect the local government sector nationally, some progress has been made during the year in improving staffing capacity across a number of

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

areas within the finance function. Measures implemented to support recruitment and retention have included targeted market supplements, career development opportunities and professional training support.

- 5.40 The council will continue to monitor finance capacity and capability risks closely and take further action where necessary to ensure the finance function remains able to effectively support the organisation through the significant financial and transformational challenges that continue to lie ahead.

Enterprise Resource Planning System

- 5.41 The city council is progressing with the programme to replace our existing Finance, HR and Payroll 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.
- 5.42 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. Ensuring the product and processes are suitable for local government and modifications to core scope by the vendor has offered opportunities to ensure a more robust implementation, delivering greater potential transformational benefits to the city council. This has extended the timeline past the original intended go live date and the target new date will be in 2027. Previous reviews by Local Partnerships and Civiteq in 2026 highlighted good overall governance, additional resource requirements and some areas to improve, and these recommendations were built into planning and programme management. Further external assurance around governance will be carried out in the summer of 2026 to ensure all processes and documentation remain robust and compliant.

Commercial Risk

- 5.43 The current economic climate continues to present significant commercial risk to the city council. Sustained inflationary pressures, including higher pay awards and contract costs, are increasing expenditure, while the cost-of-living pressures are reducing demand for some chargeable services and limiting income growth. This creates pressure on traded services and wider commercial activity. In

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

response, the council has strengthened governance arrangements to provide enhanced oversight of financial and commercial risk. The Finance Committee, chaired by the Section 151 Officer and attended by the Deputy Section 151 Officer, Chief Executive, External Financial Improvement Advisor and Portfolio Holder for Finance, meets monthly to oversee financial strategy and delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Senior Management Team attendance ensures that performance issues are identified early, and corrective action is taken where required. The Commercial Board provides strategic oversight of commercial activity, including traded services, company governance, and investment activity, with a focus on risk identification, performance monitoring and forward planning.

- 5.44 At a macro level, ongoing economic volatility—arising from post-Covid recovery, sustained inflation, rising interest rates, energy market pressures and geopolitical instability—continues to create uncertainty. This increases risk to both new and existing commercial investments. Increased operating costs, higher financing costs and variable demand may reduce returns and, in some cases, impact the recoverability of capital invested. This is reflected in specific investments such as the city council's interest in the city centre hotel, where performance has been affected by increased costs and changes in customer demand, creating risk to short- to medium-term returns. Similar pressures are evident across the Council's contract portfolio, including long-term PFI arrangements, where cost inflation can outpace available funding in the short term and requires active management.
- 5.45 In response to these risks, the council has strengthened its commercial capacity and oversight arrangements. This includes:
- Dedicated commercial oversight within the remit of the Deputy Section 151 Officer;
 - Establishment of a centralised PFI Contract Management Team; and
 - Continued development of contract management capability within the Procurement and Commercial function.

These arrangements are supported by the Commercial Board, which provides coordinated oversight of commercial risk and performance across the organisation. Consequently, the council has made the decision to end its loss-making provision of catering services, and other traded services are kept under ongoing review.

- 5.46 Robust governance arrangements are also in place for the council's wholly owned companies, including Fortior Homes and Unitas. During 2025, Unitas was successfully reintegrated into the Council, reducing delivery and governance risk, but there is ongoing work to address the legacy of relatively weak governance and management oversight. Fortior Homes completed a refinancing of its debt in April 2025, providing a more stable financial platform in the current economic environment. Notwithstanding these actions, the Council remains exposed to the ongoing impact of inflation and interest rate pressures. These factors continue to affect the risk profile of commercial investments, capital loans and traded services. The council therefore maintains close monitoring of these risks through its corporate governance and risk management framework.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Workforce Transformation Programme

- 5.47 The city council's Workforce Transformation Programme is in place to deliver a number of key projects under four key themes: Strengthening Our Workforce, Managing Our Workforce, Empowering Our Workforce and Developing Our Workforce. This work is overseen by the Organisational Development Working Group, chaired by the Chief Executive and including strong trade union representation, which is also driving the development of a new Workforce Strategy for Stoke-on-Trent City Council, built on three key pillars: Culture, Capability, Capacity. This work has delivered significant progress during 2025-2026, including the launch of a refreshed set of values for the city council, the co-production of a behaviour framework, a new approach to staff engagement, the launch of a leadership and management development programme; #FutureStoke, a wellbeing offer for all staff, a new EDI programme training and support package and an updated induction process. This has already seen some positive impacts such as a reduction in levels of sickness absence.
- 5.48 The council also undertook a full staff survey in 2025/26, securing a healthy 48% participation rate. All directorates are now delivering targeted improvements that reflect the feedback provided by the staff.

Recruitment & Retention

- 5.49 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. As part of the wider Workforce Transformation Programme, a project is working to address these challenges by reviewing and improving the end-to-end recruitment process and supporting the city council to be viewed as an employer of choice. Taking on feedback from hiring managers and staff recently recruited to the council, this project has delivered a number of process improvements to ensure the recruitment experience for candidates and hiring managers is a positive one. A refreshed job advert and an updated process for identity checks is now in place. Additional improvements have also been identified in relation to reference and identity checks and structured candidate feedback to improve experience. The Workforce Service now has a LinkedIn Recruiter licence that is proving effective at identifying potential candidates for hard to fill roles, resulting in cost avoidance for agency staff and the use of AI is also being explored as a tool to support hiring managers to recruit more efficiently. The restructure of the Workforce Service during 2025-2026 has provided capacity to promote the city council and its vacancies at a series of local and regional recruitment events.
- 5.50 The city council also continues to face similar challenges in respect of retention. It continues to be an applicant's market for certain roles and salary levels across the private sector, coupled with the continued trend of hybrid working, means that there are more opportunities than ever for employees to earn higher rates of pay without having to move out of the area. The city council continue to address this through market supplements for a number of roles and a regular review of its pay and grading structures. A series of additional employee benefits have been introduced to enhance the employee value proposition. This has included the introduction of a new hybrid working policy and a new employee benefits platform, Vivup, which offers a white goods salary sacrifice scheme to all staff alongside a series of other benefits.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Cyber Security Arrangements

- 5.51 Cyber security continues to be a priority for the city council. The National Cyber Security Centre has reported a 129% increase of nationally significant cyber-attacks from 2024 to 2025, with attacks increasingly impacting real world operations. Changes in attackers' methodology and attackers' capabilities including AI mean attacks are becoming more targeted, faster, and harder to disrupt. The city council is continually reviewing its cyber security measures in light of the changing landscape. The city council continues to develop its partnership with public sector organisations in Staffordshire, and collaborations with the sector in the West Midlands and nationally. The city council has been improving technical protections, training and communication with staff, business continuity planning, and testing of these processes.
- 5.52 Information Governance best practice has continued to develop within the authority. An annual cyber security audit has been carried out, including a penetration test exercise. 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.

Court of Protection

- 5.53 The city council's financial assessments team's functions include carrying out financial assessments for residential and non-residential care and invoicing clients for these services, acting as appointees and deputies for adults who lack capacity and supporting with the provision of direct payments for children and adults. In April 2020 the service transferred from Corporate Finance to Revenues and Benefits. Following the transfer of the service, a review of staffing, processes and procedures and internal controls was undertaken. One of the key risks identified within this review related to Court of Protection (Deputyships) bank reconciliation processes and as such focus was concentrated on this area. A number of potential internal control and reconciliation weaknesses were identified that needed to be considered and addressed. Following both an internal audit and external audit review which included the completion of an independent CIPFA review, an action plan was developed and a full reconciliation exercise commenced. This included new reconciliation procedures being put into place for new transactions, guidance and training of staff regarding the new processes. A historic reconciliation was also undertaken. The issues regarding balances were addressed and a report was presented to the Audit Committee in March 2023 under a closed agenda item.
- 5.54 The council have been in ongoing dialogue with the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) who visited the council in November 2025 and reported significant progress in a number of areas. A further internal audit report was finalised in June 2026 and provided a good opinion of the service. The report recognised the continuing work to improve processes, including the transfer of bank reconciliation

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

to the financial protection client management system. The council has now provided clients with their own bank accounts and debit cards reducing the need for weekly cash transactions and the outstanding balance on the suspense account has now been fully reconciled. This demonstrates the positive and effective impact of the internal audit review and scrutiny on service delivery across the council.

6. Other Governance Improvements

Corporate Governance

6.1 During 2025/26 the city council's officer assurance process for all senior managers has been undertaken again. 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 2025/26, key areas have been collated and are due to be 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.
- Where relevant, all respondents stated they regularly monitor expenditure against their budget
- 99% of respondents understood the key legislation governing their areas, with one respondent indicating they are still getting up to speed with legislative requirements as they were relatively new in post.
- 92% indicated that they and their team(s) were up to date with cyber security training and of the 8% that were not fully up to date, the majority understood the challenges to be tackled.
- 92% of respondents confirmed that employed workforce aligns with the agreed establishment. Where exceptions were noted, almost all confirmed HR were fully aware of these.
- 96% confirmed that operational risk registers were up to date.
- Where relevant, most respondents were aware of the contracts they were responsible for.

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

- Several areas have identified a need for further support to help them ensure systems are appropriately recorded on the corporate information asset register.
- Further effort needs to be made to ensure that all mandatory training is consistently up to date.
- There are opportunities to identify information that can be routinely published by analysing Freedom of Information requests.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- More work is required to maximise learning from complaints received.
- There is more work to do in some areas, e.g. adult care, to ensure performance and financial data is fully reconciled.

- 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 2025/26 there were two referrals made under the confidential reporting procedure, one of which is now closed. In 2024/25 two referrals were made under the procedure both of which are closed.
- 6.4 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 internal audit work has demonstrated that further work is needed to ensure full compliance. The officer level strategic co-ordinating boards continue to operate well having been reviewed and fitted within the strategic mission boards that have been created at partnership level to consolidate resources around priorities.
- 6.5 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 system of officer level boards to co-ordinate governance. The city council's internal audit function continues to add significantly to the city council's corporate governance framework and has made frequent recommendations to improve and enhance governance.
- 6.6 As a result of the 2023/24 review of the procurement operating model, the below objectives form part of the live Procurement Strategy for 2024 – 2027:
- Implement a new Operating Model that is both “fit for purpose” and drives value for money (Fully operational)
 - Adopt a common strategic approach for all tendered activity. (Fully operational)
 - Implement a common approach to support devolved Contracts Management and improved Supplier Relationship Management (Delivery phase)
 - Create a “commercially confident” and high performing team (Delivery phase)
 - Adoption of improved commercial governance. (Fully operational)
 - Ensure Source to Contract and P2P systems are effective in unlocking value for the city council (Fully operational/under review)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 6.7 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. The next stage of development is to move beyond compliance to ensure a strong focus on value for money through application of commercial acumen and proactive market management.
- 6.8 The online report management process introduced in 2023 using the Modern.gov platform, has significantly improved version control and co-ordinations for Cabinet reports, due to changes in staffing and resource pressure in democratic services extending this to other committees and Chief Officer decisions has been delayed but is still planned. 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 previously it has been reported that there is good adherence to this in the Resources and Housing Development, Growth and Operations Directorates, this is now also the case in Public Health, Children’s and Adults Directorates following further work on governance.
- 6.9 The member casework system has been updated following concerns from both members and officers due to its operation.
- 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.
- 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. The city council also encourages its senior members and managers to participate in peer reviews as part of their wider system contribution and also as a source of learning, and that has continued in 2025/26 with the Chief Executive, s151 officer and Director of Strategy, Economy and Communications all leading or being part of review teams.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Local Government Reorganisation

- 6.12 On 16 December 2025, 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. With respect to local government reform in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, five proposals were submitted by the final deadline of November 2025 from the local authorities in the area.
- 6.13 Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Stafford Borough Council, Cannock Chase District Council and East Staffordshire Borough Council submitted a proposal for two new unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This proposal would see:
- a new northern council serving Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands. This is 494,803 people.
 - a new southern council serving Stafford, East Staffordshire, Cannock Chase, Lichfield, Tamworth and South Staffordshire. This is 682,775 people.

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.

- 6.14 The other four proposals were:
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council proposed two new unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This requires some modification of existing boundaries.
 - Staffordshire County Council proposed two new unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with an East/West split.
 - Lichfield District Council, Tamworth Borough Council and South Staffordshire District Council proposed three new unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.
 - Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council proposed four new unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with a new unitary council for Newcastle-under-Lyme, a unitary for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands, a unitary for Stafford, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire and a unitary for East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Tamworth.
- 6.15 The city council could also support the first and third of these alternative proposals, but considers the county council proposal to be fundamentally flawed and the Newcastle-under-Lyme proposal to be fundamentally non-complaint against the Government's own

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

criteria. The Government ran a public consultation exercise in early 2026 to test the public's preference on the five proposals. The consultation ended on 26 March, and the Government's decision is expected in the summer.

- 6.16 Government has also consulted local authorities in the area on the creation of a Foundation Strategic Authority (FSA), and the preferred geography for the purposes of strategic land use planning. The Leaders of all ten councils wrote a joint letter to ministers in response to this expressing their shared interest in establishing an FSA for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent at the first opportunity, with the same spatial planning footprint. The response outlined that as a group of local authorities, they were more than ready to take this step, having first expressed our desire to start the devolution process some eighteen months ago. With the growing imbalance in resources and powers between areas with and without Strategic Authorities, it is imperative that they now have the opportunity to establish an FSA in Staffordshire without further delay.
- 6.17 The ten local authorities are already in the process of crafting the first Growth Plan for the geography and have established an Innovation Framework in partnership with our two main universities. They already collaborate across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent on business support, tourism, place marketing, careers development, nature recovery and waste disposal, amongst other areas of work. More formal devolution to a newly created FSA is a logical next step. The local authorities stated that they were pleased that Government itself has recognised that Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent is a sensible footprint for strategic spatial planning. With a population of over a million people and a strongly inter-dependent economy using shared infrastructure, we agree wholeheartedly with the Government's judgement on this matter. They have no desire or need to combine with any other geographies. And whatever the Government decides upon in terms of the future local government structure for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, they were confident that a single strategic authority for the whole of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent area would complement any unitary structure.
- 6.18 The developmental governance is already in place, in the form of a Leaders' Board and a supporting CEO Board and would be able to move rapidly to establish the governance model, the core structure and the operating framework for a new FSA. They were prepared to work at pace and would like to see the new strategic authority in place as early as April 2027 if the Government was willing to work at equal pace.

Climate Change

- 6.19 The city council remains in pursuit of 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. Further it has now developed its sustainability strategy to cover council wide activities and approaches seeking to embed sustainable approaches in all of its decision making and actions. Addressing climate change and providing sustainable outcomes continues to be a requirement of all Cabinet members through their portfolios and all relevant city

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

council strategies, plans and programmes but with clear guidance on how this should be delivered and with a supporting action plan to allow the council to meet its obligations and objectives. All procurement includes a sustainability review and needs to take corporate social responsibility into account. A new Electric Vehicle charging strategy has been developed and delivery also now underway.

- 6.20 In its publication in 2023 of its energy and decarbonisation strategy, the city council set out agreed action plans for 2, 5 and 10 years. An analysis has been undertaken following the completion of the first two years of the strategy showing significant progress against the key priorities and actions. Work continues in directly supporting the delivery of the action plan and next phases set out for the next three years to the 5-year point. As a consequence, the council continues to reduce grid power and gas consumption with further related carbon emissions, however whilst transport energy consumption and emissions have increased in line with expanded service delivery the overall council trajectory remains downwards towards its 2032 target. Work undertaken to support schools through an option to jointly purchase energy, making savings and enabling investment in renewables and energy efficiency has seen a number of retained schools join the council energy purchasing scheme enhancing the outcome for the schools and city as a result.
- 6.21 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 the new warm homes programme, the city council will continue to deliver decarbonisation projects which will be configured into a city-wide approach to net zero in the future. The council is now in the process of bringing forward a single Sustainability strategy that will deal with both mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. This should be approved during the 2026/27 municipal year.

Handford Energy from Waste

- 6.22 A particular focus for the council over the last year and going forward has been in developing proposals for the management of residual waste for the long term as a consequence of the current facility coming to the end of its useful life. The Handford Energy from Waste (EfW) facility in Stoke-on-Trent will reach 37 years operational life by 2032. The city council must decide whether to close, refurbish, or replace the facility. Currently processing up to 200,000 tonnes of waste annually and generating significant net income, the facility is critical to the Authority's waste management and financial position. The cost to the council of "doing nothing" would be the requirement to close down the facility with an estimated cost to redirect waste of around £18m annually indexed, and £454m, were this position to be retained over 25 years.
- 6.23 The council has secured a contract running 2025-up to 2032 for the existing facility to ensure operational continuity whilst determining the long-term solution. An outline business case presented the strategic, economic, financial, commercial, and management analysis underpinning the Council's recommendation to pursue options for a replacement, informed by extensive market engagement and

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

operational experience. A rigorous two-step options analysis was undertaken. Step 1 evaluated three service delivery approaches: (1) Decommission and use external disposal; (2) Refurbish the existing 37-year-old facility at approximately 85% of new build cost for uncertain 15-year extension; (3) Build new replacement facility with 230-290ktpa capacity. Financial modelling and technical assessment recommended Option 3 as meeting strategic, policy, financial and commercial requirements. Through the opening of a procurement the council is pursuing Option 3 in the market, to determine commercial viability, and market deliverability before making a decision as to whether it should proceed to delivery. In the meantime, it will carry out public consultation in advance of the required land-use planning process. It is also directly engaging government on the process in the context of its overall financial position, the evolving regulatory environment for waste disposal and the impact of potential local government reorganisation.

Community Energy Scheme (CES) Group Claim.

- 6.24 During 2025/26 the council were served with a class action (Group Claim) alongside CES. The claim consists of 212 tenants of the council who have taken action against CES and the authority in relation to the installation of solar panels on the roof of the properties in which they reside, dating back to 2018/19. The claim is being defended separately by both CES and the authority whilst we are also simultaneously involved in settlement discussions together with CES due to the potential litigation costs of the claim. The actual claim is being managed by the court, but a final hearing date is likely to be in 2027.

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 Children and Families Sufficiency Board carefully scrutinise 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 stepchildren down (where it is safe to do so alongside ensuring 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.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 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. The overall number of the council's own foster carers had reduced in 2024/25, with a slight recovery in 2025/26, and numbers, including access to independent fostering provision, remains insufficient for need. A refreshed digital recruitment campaign has been launched with early indicators showing an increase in the number of potential foster carers 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 2025/26, 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.
- 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 legislation, 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-

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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.

- 7.7 The city council has a refreshed 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 In response to financial pressures within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), particularly within the High Needs Block, the council has established a High Needs Board chaired by the Chief Executive. As at 31 March 2026, the DSG deficit stands at £33.6m, reflecting national pressures associated with increasing demand, complexity of need and rising costs. During 2025/26, significant action has been taken to control the in-year deficit, resulting in a stabilisation of growth, with the outturn some £4m better than the expected position at the start of the financial year. This has been achieved through the principal approaches of:
- Reducing reliance on independent sector placements by increasing in-city provision, including the expansion of special school places and resource bases within mainstream settings.
 - Strengthening inclusion within mainstream education to ensure children and young people with SEND can access appropriate support without escalation to specialist provision.
 - Additionally, strengthened internal decision-making processes have been implemented to ensure multi-agency panels operate consistently and in line with statutory requirements.
- 7.9 Despite these measures, significant financial pressures remain within the High Needs Block, and delivering services within the current legislative framework and funding envelope remains challenging. In February 2026, the Government published the Schools White Paper alongside a SEND consultation, outlining proposed national reforms. This includes a High Needs Stability Grant available to local authorities with DSG deficits, subject to approval of a Partnership SEND Reform Plan. The council's reform plan is currently in development and scheduled for submission in June 2026. Subject to approval, the authority may receive a stability grant of up to 90% of the DSG deficit in Autumn 2026. In addition, the DfE has announced further revenue, capital and transformation funding to support implementation of national reform priorities.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

7.10 Ongoing scrutiny of the DSG financial position and progress against improvement activity is provided through the Schools Forum.

8. Adult Social Care

- 8.1 The city council continues to face challenges in terms increasing costs of adult care, that have increased during 2025/26 for a number of reasons, including changes in practices by the NHS. The city council is investing more than £148.8m (gross) for 2026/27 in commissioned adults social care services, including an additional £7.12m through the approval of the 2026/27 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. The 2026/27 Fee Strategy was developed following a cost of care exercise, market engagement and public consultation. The cost of care exercise as agreed by Cabinet will be undertaken on a 3 yearly basis as part of the adult social care fee setting process. The annual adult social care fee setting process for 2026/27 onwards will be aligned to timescales for the council's MTFS process with the aim for fee uplifts to be agreed before the new financial year.
- 8.2 The number domiciliary care (home care) hours delivered is increasing however the number of people entering care homes (including nursing homes) continues to increase, particularly in residential care. Commissioners continued to develop alternative options to residential care, including Extra Care, Supported Living and the development of micro-providers and direct payments.
- 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 2025-2026, to be delivered and monitored by the JCB. The services commissioned through the BCF are continually reviewed 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 a significant number of discharge to assess beds and lack of investment in Pathway 1. A review of discharge pathways and a shift in investment is a key priority in 2025/26 to support people returning home following a hospital admission.
- 8.4 The contract monitoring and quality assurance of commissioned care providers has been reviewed, and the Provider Market Quality Framework will now be combined with the council's Large Scale Enquiry Protocol as one single overarching framework across Commissioning Quality Assurance and Improvements and Safeguarding. The Market Oversight Group (MOG) is fully embedded and continues to grow and develop through the development of our shared intelligence, data dashboard, joint assessment of risk. This includes the development of the Provider Incident Reporting Form (PIRF) which has been fully implemented and is a tool used by health and social care professionals to submit incident reports directly to Adult Social Care. It is part of the professional portal, allowing

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

for direct referrals and reporting. 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. This is supported by a Risk Management Matrix, through shared intelligence with partners including Safeguarding. Commissioners have also been developing improved engagement and coproduction 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 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) subgroup.
- 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, Housing and Public Health Commissioning activity. This Board is aligned to the council's Commercial Board and Procurement Assurance Board (PAB) ensuring governance and oversight of the delivery of the Commissioning and Procurement Pipeline. The work of the CoCo Board ensures the oversight and governance 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. The Commercial Board is chaired by the city council's Section 151 Officer. The PAB provides the gateway approach to Procurement and is aligned to the Commercial Board.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

9. Public Health

9.1 The public health grant is invested to improve health outcomes across the city in a range of vital preventative services. During 2026/27 the city council reviewed the spend in line with the grant conditions, whether it is improving public health outcomes, is value for money and aligned with the city's ambitions to improve health. This consisted of

- Reviewing all investments made to city council services through a standard framework process covering the above
- Benchmarking outcomes against other peer local authorities and reprioritising spend
- Reviewing external investments and continuous contract management to improve reach and outcomes
- Light touch peer review with other West Midlands public health teams to improve quality of services
- Undertaking internal audit of specific services to ensure there is clear governance of investment and taking action on recommendations

9.2 With the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) going through further change this presents both opportunities and risks. The reduction in the number of ICB staff and the wider footprint present risk that the commissioners do not understand Stoke-on-Trent fully and its needs. To mitigate this, close working relationships are being formed with the new ICB team to inform action, based on the needs of the city. The city council is supportive of a city NHS Board to oversee NHS services in the city and would report to the ICB and Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure there is clear governance in delivery of local NHS services.

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 implementation of the recommendations made by the PAS review have continued to progress well over the last year. In Development Management, a major milestone was hit with the implementation of the new back-office IT system and although there is more to do, it is a significant achievement. The Local List was successfully consulted upon and has now been in use since November 2025. The service is part of the Open Digital Planning community and has been working with government on the sharing and integration of planning data. The first phase of this work shared local data on heritage assets, conservation areas and protected trees with national records. Work to take a firmer approach with applicants and their agents has also continued; with the first developer and agent forum held. This forum provided a space for dialogue and engagement through change and will continue after a positive response. The next major phase of work remains centred on engagement with local planning agents and developers to improve the quality of submissions. To assist, government backed digital planning software, Plan X, has been secured, and will be implemented in 26/27. The software provides, amongst other things, online work-flow tools to enable greater self-service options for planning queries.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- 10.2 In respect of Planning Policy, the recommendations around governance and accountability have been implemented and have worked well. The draft Local Plan was publicly consulted on in September/October, with significant engagement across the city. The representations received have been analysed and will be taken into account when the Plan progresses to its final stages in 2026. The Plan remains on track for submission to government by the end of December 2026.

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, the council has initiated a programme of works that commenced 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's 25-year Schools PFI contract expired on 25 October 2025, covering maintenance and facilities management services for 88 schools. Due to the complexity of the hand back process, a dedicated project team and programme board were established, overseen by the Chief Executive, to manage transition and mitigate associated risks. Inflationary pressures in the final years of the contract increased the cost of identified hand back works beyond the funding available within the contractual mechanism. As a result, the contract expired with a number of required works incomplete. The provider, Transform Schools (Stoke) Limited, subsequently entered Creditors' Voluntary Liquidation. The council has retained remaining project funds and continues to work with schools and trusts to agree outstanding works and delivery arrangements within the available resources, supplemented by some additional capital finance provided by the local authority from existing capital allocations and contingency funds. Engagement with the Department for Education and the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority has supported this process. These risks are reflected within the council's corporate risk register and are subject to regular review through established governance arrangements.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

11. Partnerships

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 The delivery of the prospectus is being overseen by a strategic partnership board comprising key partners across the city, and the first meeting took place 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 was 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. Regular updates on the delivery plan are presented to a forum made up representatives from a range of Government departments. Three of the five mission boards have been established so far, with the remaining two due during 2026.

12. Significant Governance Issues

- 12.1 In 2025/26 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.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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.

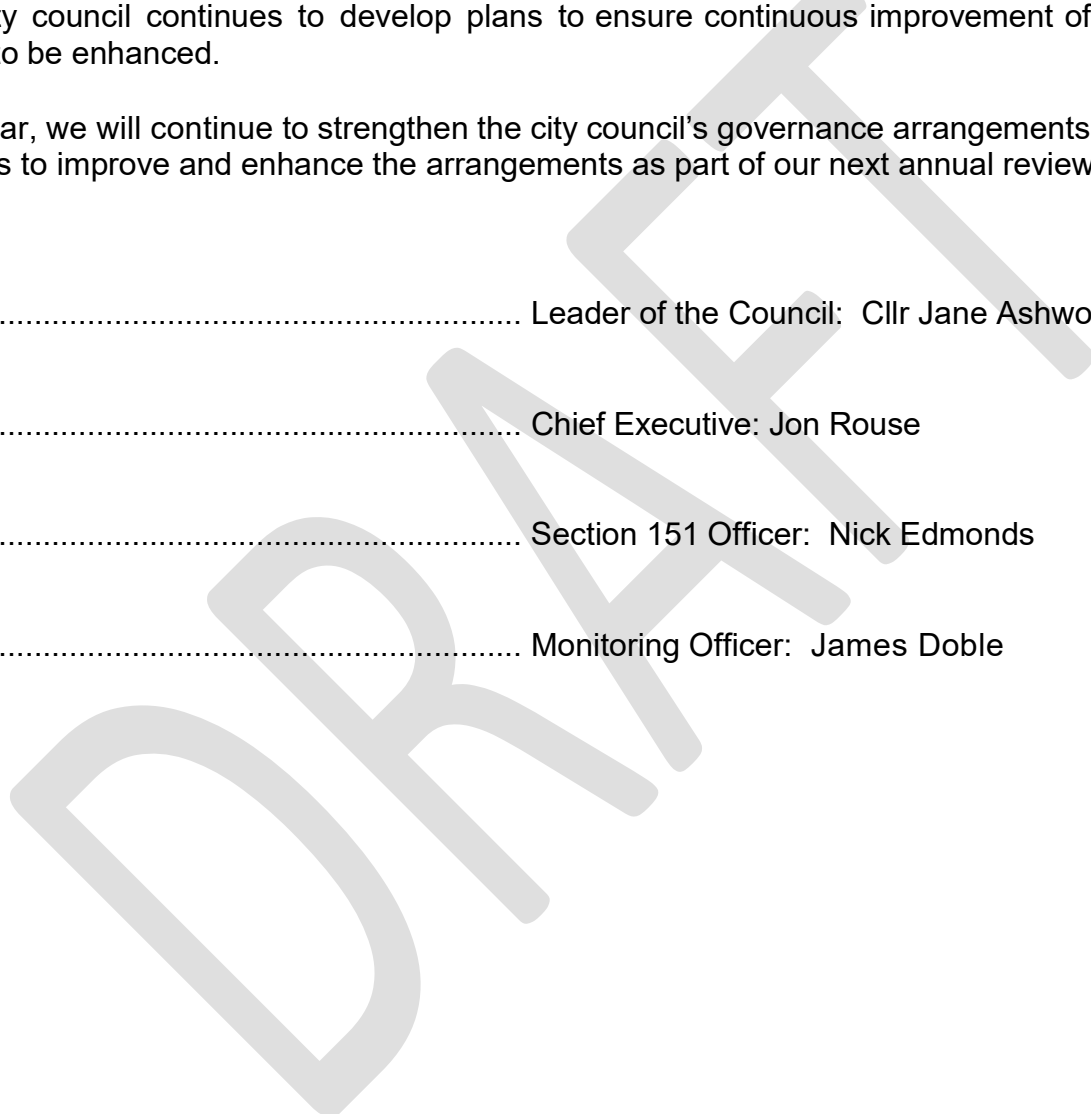
Signed:

..... Leader of the Council: Cllr Jane Ashworth
Date:

..... Chief Executive: Jon Rouse
Date:

..... Section 151 Officer: Nick Edmonds
Date:

..... Monitoring Officer: James Doble
Date:



Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

APPENDIX 1

Principle A – 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>City 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 2025</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

<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> <u>Procurement Code</u> <u>Responsible Procurement Code</u> <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 LGO's own website in July each year.</p>	<p><u>Compliments, Comments and Complaints Process</u> <u>Stoke-on-Trent City Council Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy 2025</u> <u>Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code</u> <u>LGO Annual Review Letter 2025</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 receive regular update reports outlining progress in implementing key anti-fraud actions to protect the city council's interests.</p>	<p><u>Counter-Fraud, Corruption & Error Strategy</u> <u>Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption & Error</u> <u>Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Principle B – Building trust through openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Ref	How we can demonstrate that the city council meets this principle	Evidence
PB.1	<p>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</p>	<p><u>Notice of Decisions</u></p>
PB.2	<p>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 way². City council and Cabinet Meetings are broadcast live on the internet and are available online to be watched after the event.</p>	<p><u>City council Meeting Webcasts</u> <u>Cabinet & City Council Meetings</u></p>
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> <p><u>Community Cohesion Strategy</u> <u>No Platform for Extremism</u></p>

² Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

<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 2024/25 was published in November 2025 and shows an increase in stage 1 corporate complaints compared to the previous year. The 2025/26 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 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Annual Customer Feedback Report 2024/2025 App1</u></p>
<p>PB.5</p>	<p>The City Council Operating Plan for 2025/2026 was reported to the Cabinet in June 2025 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 2025-2026</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 2025/26

<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 2025/26</u> <u>Budget Consultation - Stabilisation & Recovery Plan-Next Steps 2025-2026</u> <u>Budget Consultation Feedback Annex Bi</u></p> <p><u>Budget Consultation 2026/27</u> <u>Budget Statement and Consultation Medium Term Financial Strategy - 2026/27</u> <u>Budget Consultation Feedback 2026/27 Annex Bi</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. 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 authority has a number of strategies in place to protect families and improve education.</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>Safeguarding Children Partnership Stoke-on-Trent</u> <u>Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024/2025</u> <u>Joint All Age Carers Strategy 2025-2029</u> <u>Domestic Abuse Strategy</u> <u>Family Matters-CYPF Strategy 2026/2030</u></p> <p><u>Improving Education Strategy 2025 - 2030</u> <u>Improving Education Strategy 2025 - 2030 - App1</u> <u>Improving Education Strategy 2025 - 2030 - App 2</u></p> <p><u>Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub</u> <u>Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent COP Charter</u> <u>Staffordshire Stoke - On - Trent COP Charter App1</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

PB.9	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.	<u>Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025</u>
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Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Principle C – Defining the entity’s 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 2025/26.</p> <p>The council has a number of policies in place to support the city’s economic development whilst assessing the impact on environment.</p>	<p><u>Our City, Our Wellbeing Corporate Strategy 2024-2028 Strategic Planning and Performance Framework Operating Plan 2025-2026</u></p> <p><u>Improvement and Productivity Plan 2023-2027 App2</u></p> <p><u>Improvement and Productivity Plan 2023-2027 App3</u></p> <p><u>Silicon Stoke Prospectus</u></p> <p><u>Economic Development Strategy 2024/2028</u></p> <p><u>Future 100 City Prospectus- Shaping Our City Growth for All - App1</u></p> <p><u>Future 100 City Prospectus and Delivery Plan Shaping Our City Growth for All - App2</u></p> <p><u>Delivering a Stronger Staffordshire - Appendix</u></p> <p><u>Local Air Quality Strategy 2025-2030 - App1</u></p> <p><u>Local Air Quality Strategy - App 2</u></p> <p><u>Local Air Quality Strategy - Action Plan - App3</u></p> <p><u>Statutory Biodiversity Report January 2026</u></p> <p><u>Biodiversity Duty Report - App 1</u></p> <p><u>Smoke-free Stoke - on - Trent: Tobacco Control Strategy 2025-2030</u></p> <p><u>Smoke-free Stoke - on -Trent: Tobacco Control Strategy 2025-2030 - App 1</u></p> <p><u>Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy 2025-2030 - App A</u></p> <p><u>EV Infrastructure Strategy - Delivery Action Plan - App B</u></p> <p><u>Stoke-on-Trent Cultural Strategy 2022/2028</u></p> <p><u>Visitor Economy Strategy 2022/2027</u></p> <p><u>Library Strategy 2022/2025</u></p> <p><u>Anti - Social Behaviour – Cross Tenure Policy - App1</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

PC.1

Local Transport Plan P3
Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan 2022-2031
Joint Strategic Transport Statement report February 2025
Collaborative Transport Vision and Joint Strategic Transport Statement
Joint Strategic Transport Statement
Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan 2022-2028
Bus Service Improvement Plan BSIP Investment Programme 2025/26
Bus Service Improvement Delivery Plan 2025/26
Bus Service Improvement Delivery Plan BSIP Phase 4 - 2025/26 App1
Bus Service Improvement Plan existing programme progress update - App 2
Green Space Strategy 2018-2033
Stoke-on-Trent Green Space Strategy Interim Update
Stoke-on-Trent Open Space and Green Infrastructure Assessment Consultation
Playing Pitch Strategy 2021/2040
Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2025-2035
Stoke -Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy - Final Report
Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy & Action Plan

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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.

The council's supports its vulnerable residents through its council tax support scheme and council housing.

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

[Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026](#)
[Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026 App1](#)

[Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026](#)
[Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026 Appendix 1](#)

[Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026](#)
[Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026 Appendix 1](#)

[Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App1](#)

[Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025-26.](#)
[Council Tax Support Scheme- Appendix](#)
[Housing Revenue Account HRA Rent Setting Report 2025-26](#)

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

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

[Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2026/2027](#)

[Addendum to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/2027](#)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 2025/2026
Capital Investment Programme Funding 2025/2026-2034/35 MTFS - Annex N
Capital Investment Programme - HRO Annex Mi
Capital Investment Programme - CAFS Annex Mii
Capital Investment Programme - ASC Annex Miii
Capital Investment Programme - PHLTH Annex Miv
Capital Investment Programme - RES Annex Mv
Capital Investment Programme - CHEX Annex Mvi
Prudential Indicators 2025/26 - 2034/35 Annex O
Capital Programme - Schools 2025-26

Capital Programme Update 2025/26-2034/35
Capital Programme update - Addendum to Report Summarised amendments to the programme App A
Revised Capital Investment Programme 2025/26 to 2034/35 HRO - Appendix Bi
Revised Capital Investment Programme 2025/26 to 2034/35 CAF - Appendix Bii
Revised Capital Investment Programme 2025/26 to 2034/35- Resources Appendix Biii
Revised Capital Investment Programme 2025/26 to 2034/35- ASCAAC Appendix Bv
Revised Capital Investment Programme 2025/26 to 2034/35-PHPAW Appendix Bvi
Revised Capital Investment Programme Funding 2025/26 to 2034/35 Appendix C
Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex G
Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Gi
Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Gii
Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex G
Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex Gi
Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex Gii

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

		<p><u>Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Capital Investment Programme Changes</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Capital Investment HRO Annex Gi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Cap Investment Programme Outturn Annex Gii</u></p> <p><u>Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025-26 App CC</u> <u>Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025/2026</u> <u>Addendum (Item 15) to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/2026</u> <u>Treasury Management Policy Statement 2025/2026- CIPFA Code of Practice</u></p> <p><u>Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2026/27</u> <u>Addendum to Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/2027</u></p>
<p>PC.4</p>	<p>The annual report on the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26, 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 2025 (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 2025/2026 & Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement 2025/2026</u> <u>Treasury Management Policy Statement and Strategy 2025/2026</u> <u>Prudential Indicators 2025 - 26 - Annex O</u> <u>Annual Minimum Revenue (MRP) Policy Statement 2025/2026 - Annex P</u> <u>Treasury Management and Policy Statement 2025/2026 - Annex Q</u> <u>Economic and Interest Rate Forecast 2025/2026 - Annex R</u> <u>Risk Register 2025/2026 - Annex S</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

		<u>Position on Reserves 2025/2026 - Annex T</u>
PC.5	<p>The council have produced a Land and Asset Management Plan and action 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>	<u>Land and Property Asset Management Plan 2024 - 2029</u> <u>Land and Property Asset Management Action Plan</u>

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Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 2025/2026</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex C</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex D</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex E</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex F</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Fi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex G</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Gi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Gii</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex H</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex I</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex J</u> <u>Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex K</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex A</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex B</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex C</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex D</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex E</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex F</u> <u>HRA Analysis of Budget Variances Q2 Annex Fi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex G</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex Gi</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex Gii</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex H</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex I</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex J</u> <u>Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex K</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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.

Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2025/2026
Treasury Management Review 2025/2026 Q3
Financial Performance Report Q3 2025/2026
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex A
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex B
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex C
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex D
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex E
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex F
HRA Analysis of Budget Variances Q3 2025/2026 Annex Fi
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Capital Investment Programme Changes
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Capital Investment HRO Annex Gi
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Cap Inv Programme Summary Forecast Outturn Annex Gii
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex H
Financial Performance Q3 Annex I
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex J
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 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

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 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
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

Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App 1

Overview & Scrutiny Committees

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 and Council Tax Setting 2025-2026. App CC

Medium Term Financial Strategy and Council Tax Setting 2025/2026

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

Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2026/2027

Medium Term Financial Strategy & Council Tax Setting 2026/2027

CIPFA External Assurance Review
CIPFA External Assurance Review Sept 2024
EFS Confirmation Letter 2023/2024 & 2024/2025
EFS Confirmation Letter 2025/2026

Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App1

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

<p>PD.3</p>	<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 Service Complaint Handling Code 2024</u></p> <p><u>Tenants Charter and Service Standards</u></p> <p><u>Tenants' Voice</u></p> <p><u>Registered Provider Charter Stoke-on-Trent</u></p>
<p>PD.4</p>	<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> <p><u>Digital Strategy - Essential Next Steps</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

<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 2025 - 2028</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>SEND Strategy 2024 - 2028</u></p> <p><u>Youth Justice Annual Plan 2025/2026</u></p> <p><u>Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027</u></p> <p><u>Joint Dementia Strategy 2025-2029</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 2025-2028 have been developed.</p>	<p><u>Equality and Diversity Strategy 2022/2025</u></p> <p><u>Equalities Objectives 2025-2028</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Principle E – Developing the capacities and capabilities of the entity and its leadership.

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>	
PE.2	The city council has four statutory ³ posts with responsibility for governance.	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 Culture and Heritage
		Senior Information Risk Owner	Director – Legal, Governance Culture and Heritage

³ 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 2025/26

PE.3	<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>	<u>Constitution</u>
PE.4	<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>	Councillor Induction Plan 2023-2027 (Internal only) <u>Role of a Councillor</u>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

<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 2025.</p> <p>Information is also provided about member’s remuneration.</p>	<p><u>Pay Policy Statement 2025/2026</u></p> <p><u>Pay Policy Statement 2026/2027</u></p> <p><u>Members Allowances 2025/2026</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 2025/26. 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>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

PE.7

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. Five proposals were submitted by the final deadline of November 2025 from the local authorities in the area.

Our Proposal for LGR in Staffordshire

Local Government Reorganisation LGR and Devolution

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Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Principle F – Managing risks, opportunities and performance through robust internal controls

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 2026</u></p> <p><u>Management of Risk Policy</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 2025/2026](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex A](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex B](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex C](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex D](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex E](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex F](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Fi](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex G](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Gi](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex Gii](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex H](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex I](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex J](#)
- [Financial Performance Q1 2025/2026 Annex K](#)

- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex A](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex B](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex C](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex D](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex E](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex F](#)
- [HRA Analysis of Budget Variances Q2 Annex Fi](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex G](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex Gi](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex Gii](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex H](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex I](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex J](#)
- [Financial Performance Q2 2025/2026 Annex K](#)

- [Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2025/2026](#)
- [Treasury Management Review 2025/2026 Q3](#)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Financial Performance Report Q3 2025/2026
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex A
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex B
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex C
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex D
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex E
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex F
HRA Analysis of Budget Variances Q3
2025/2026 Annex Fi
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Capital
Investment Programme Changes
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Capital
Investment HRO Annex Gi
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Cap Inv
Prog Outturn Annex Gii
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex H
Financial Performance Q3 Annex I
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 Annex J
Financial Performance Q3 2025/2026 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

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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

Corporate Measures Annual Refresh
Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q1 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q2 2025/2026 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026
Corporate Measures Q3 2025/2026 Appendix 1
Corporate Measures Q4 2024/2025 App1
Treasury Management Annual Report 2024/2025 & Quarter 1 2025/2026 Performance Summary

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

<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 Monitoring Half Year Monitoring Report 25/26</u> <u>Internal Audit Monitoring 2025/2026 Q1-2 Appendix1.</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Monitoring Q3 2025/2026</u> <u>Internal Audit Monitoring 2025/2026 Q3 Appendix</u></p> <p><u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/2025</u> <u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2024-2025 Appendix</u></p> <p><u>External Review of Internal Audit March 2023</u> <u>External Review of Internal Audit Appendix</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 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.

Counter Fraud, Corruption & Error Strategy

Statement on Countering Fraud, Corruption & Error

Counter Fraud Half Year Update 2025-2026

National Fraud Initiative

Staffordshire Counter Fraud Partnership

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 2025/2026</u></p> <p><u>Members Allowances 2025/2026</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>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

PG.3	<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 2024/2025</u></p> <p><u>Accounting Policies Adopted for 2025/2026 Statement of Accounts</u></p> <p><u>Accounting Policies for the 2025-26 Statement of Accounts Appendix1.</u></p>
PG.4	<p>The Audit and Standards Committee have 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>Audit and Standards Committee Annual Report 2024/2025</u></p>

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

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 2025/2026. Where recommendations have been made to improve processes, these are being addressed by appropriate officers. From the work undertaken in 2025/2026 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 2025/26, 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 2025/2026](#)

[Internal Audit Charter 2026/2027](#)

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

[Internal Audit Strategy and Plan 2026-27](#)

[Internal Audit Plan 2026-27 Appendix1](#)

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

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

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

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