Civic Centre
Riverside
Stafford
ST16 3AQ

13 July 2026

Dear Members

Council Meeting

I hereby give notice that a meeting of the Council will be held in the **Council Chamber, County Buildings, Martin Street, Stafford** on **Tuesday 21 July 2026 at 7.00pm** to deal with the business as set out on the agenda.

Tim Clegg
Chief Executive

COUNCIL MEETING - 21 July 2026

Mayor, Councillor Mark Winnington

AGENDA

1 Freedom of the Borough Presentation to Alderman Jack Kemp

2 Approval of the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 18 May 2026 as published on the Council's website.

3 Apologies for Absence

4 Declarations of Interest

5 Announcements (Paragraph 3.2(iii) of the Council Procedure Rules)

(i) Tribute to former Councillor Angela Loughran

6 Public Question Time - Nil

7 Councillor Session

Councillor D P Rouxel has submitted the following question in accordance with Paragraph 12.3(a) of the Council Procedure Rules:-

"Question for Cllr J Hood, Cabinet Member for Community.

Last year the Council approved a new scheme for providing financial support to voluntary and community groups. Could you provide an update on the how well the new scheme has worked, what changes have taken place in terms of the support the funding is providing and if there are any plans to make amendments for the next round of funding next year".

8 Notice of Motion - Nil

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9	Code of Governance and Annual Governance Statement	3 - 32
10	Annual Scrutiny Business Report	33 - 38
11	Any items referred from Scrutiny Committee(s)	

Chief Executive

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Agenda Item 9

Code of Governance and Annual Governance Statement

Committee:	Council
Date of Meeting:	21 July 2026
Report of:	Head of Business Support and Assurance
Portfolio:	Resources Portfolio

The following matter was considered by the Audit and Accounts Committee at its meeting on 25 June 2026 and is submitted to Council as required.

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To set out the Council's revised Code of Governance and the Annual Governance Statement for the year 2025/26.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the Code of Governance be approved;

2.2 That the Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26 set out in Appendix 2 and the Governance Improvement Plan set out in Annex 2 be approved.

Reasons for Recommendations

2.3 The publication of an annual governance statement is a statutory requirement and the review of the Council's governance arrangements is essential in ensuring that they are maintained up to date and operate effectively.

2.4 Adopting a Code of Corporate Governance helps to support this obligation and provides a framework for the operation of the Council.

3 Key Issues

3.1 The Council's Code of Governance has been revised to reflect the updated guidance from Cipfa/Solace. A copy of the Code of Governance is attached at Appendix 1 and the governance framework is illustrated in Appendix 1 / Annex 1.

3.2 The Cipfa/Solace guidance is based on 7 principles of governance and these have been adopted in full. For each of the 7 principles of good governance, the Code outlines what arrangements the Council has in place to support delivery of the principles in practice.

3.3 The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the Council to review the effectiveness of its system of internal control and to prepare an Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The Council's draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2025/26 is attached as Appendix 2.

3.4 The review of the Council's governance arrangements has identified areas for improvement and these are set out in the improvement plan contained within the AGS at Appendix 2 / Annex 2.

3.5 An update on the progress in actioning the issues from the AGS for 2024/25 is referred to in the AGS for 2025/26 and a more detailed update is provided in a separate report on this agenda (the Governance Improvement Plan Progress Report for 2025/26).

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

4.1 The Council's corporate governance framework cuts across all corporate priorities but primarily supports the priority for "Effective Council" – "Good governance across the Council".

5 Report Detail

Code of Governance

5.1 In 2016 Cipfa/Solace issued guidance on "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government" setting out a framework based on 7 principles of good governance. An addendum was issued in 2025 as a result of concerns that "governance has not been fit for purpose in all authorities" following a number of high profile cases nationally which resulted in Section 114 reports, reports in the public interest, or other interventions. Examples of the concerns cited include:

- a culture that allows for widespread failure to follow due process, the constitution, and codes of conduct,
- weak oversight and challenge from those charged with governance,
- reduced capacity and/or capability in critical areas,
- a lack of self-assessment and commitment to continuous improvement

5.2 The 7 principles of governance have not changed in the addendum but the sub principles used in the 2016 Framework have been updated and replaced with a series of prompts as to what arrangements Councils should have in place to deliver each of the principles.

5.3 The Council's Code of Governance has been reviewed and the local arrangements in place to support the principles have been updated. The only change of note is that the updated Code adopts the 7 principles of governance in full; previously the Council had chosen to combine two of the recommended principles into one.

5.4 A copy of the Code of Governance is attached at Appendix 1. An illustration of the Governance Framework is given in Annex 1 of Appendix 1.

Annual Governance Statement

5.5 The preparation and publication of an annual governance statement is necessary to meet the statutory requirement set out in the Audit and Accounts Regulations 2015 which requires authorities to "conduct a review of the effectiveness of system of internal control" and to "prepare an annual governance statement".

5.6 The addendum to the Cipfa/Solace Code of Governance includes more guidance on how to conduct review of effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements and changes to what should be included in the Annual Governance Statement.

5.7 A review of the effectiveness of the governance framework has been undertaken using information from a range of sources. This year's review of effectiveness has included a self-assessment of effectiveness against the local Code and an assessment against the Cipfa/Solace guidance to identify any gaps in our framework.

5.8 The Leadership Team has been consulted on the draft AGS to ensure that:

- all of the significant issues have been identified and included, so far as is reasonably possible; and
- all of the issues included are considered to be significant.

5.9 It is not possible to give a single definition as to what constitutes a "significant governance issue" and judgement has to be exercised. But guidance advises that the following factors should used in making such judgements include:

- the issue has seriously prejudiced or prevented achievement of a principal objective;

- the issue has resulted in a need to seek additional funding to allow it to be resolved, or has resulted in significant diversion of resources from another service area;
- the issue has led to a material impact on the accounts;
- the Chief Internal Auditor has reported on it as significant, for this purpose, in the Internal Audit Annual Report;
- the issue, or its impact, has attracted significant public interest or has seriously damaged the reputation of the Council;
- the issue has resulted in formal action being taken by the Chief Financial Officer and/or the Monitoring Officer.

5.10 Following approval of the Annual Governance Statement it will be signed by the Chair of the Audit and Accounts Committee, the Leader and the Chief Executive. The AGS will be reported to full Council as part of the annual report on the work of the Audit and Accounts Committee.

5.11 Progress in addressing the significant issues identified in the Annual Governance Statement will be monitored through reports presented to the Audit and Accounts Committee.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

None arising directly from the report.

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

A failure to maintain good governance has been identified as a risk in the Council’s strategic risk register. Several other risks contained in the Strategic Risk Register are also referred to in the Annual Governance Statement.

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

Appendix 1: Code of Governance

Appendix 1, Annex 1: Governance Framework

Appendix 2: Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Appendix 2, Annex 2: Governance Improvement Plan for 2026/27

8 Previous Consideration

Audit and Accounts Committee – 25 June 2026 – Minute No AAC7/26

9 Background Papers

Annual Internal Audit Report 2025/26

Strategic Risk Register as at April 2026

External Auditor’s Annual Report Year ended 31 March 2025 (issued June 2026)

Code of Governance - Self Assessment of Effectiveness 2025/26

Contact Officer:	Judith Aupers
Telephone Number:	01543 464411
Ward Interest:	Nil
Report Track:	Audit and Accounts Committee 25 June 2026 Council 21 July 2026
Key Decision:	No

Appendix 1

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Stafford Borough Council recognises that it is responsible for ensuring that its business is 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. In discharging this accountability Members and officers will be responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of the authority's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal.

1.2 To this end the authority has approved and adopted this Code of Corporate Governance which is consistent with the principles and requirements of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework for *"Delivering Good Governance in Local Government".*

1.3 Governance is about how the Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

1.4 The seven key principles of good governance are:

a) Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law;
b) Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
c) Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits;
d) Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes;
e) Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it;
f) Managing risks and performance through robust internal; control and strong public financial management; and
g) Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

1.5 This Code applies to all officers and Members in the discharge of their duties.

2. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

2.1 The authority supports and will apply the core principles of good corporate governance. How the Council will do this is set out in the table below:

Sub Principles	Arrangements the Council has in place
Core Principle 1: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	
Behaving with integrity	• The Council has in place Codes of Conduct for both Members and Employees which set out requirements that support the need to behave with integrity.

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Sub Principles	Arrangements the Council has in place
	• The Council has a set of values which are underpinned by a set of expected behaviours. Integrity is one of the Council's values. • All new Members and Employees are made aware of the Code of Conduct when they join the Council.
Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values	• A framework of policies for Speaking Up and Anti-Fraud and Bribery to discourage inappropriate activities and to encourage the reporting of any instances found. • Members are required to declare any conflicts of interest at annually and at meetings. • Employees are required to notify their line manager of any conflicts of interest and when tendering for goods or services they have to sign a declaration regarding any conflicts of interest.
Respecting the rule of law	• The Council has in place a Monitoring Officer who works with Members and Employees to ensure that the law is adhered to. • Managers are responsible for checking that the law and local policies are complied with in their service area. Internal Audit through their work programme undertake independent checks on compliance with policies and procedures. • Disciplinary procedures are in place to investigate breaches of policy by employees and the Monitoring Officer will investigate breaches of the Code of Conduct by Members. • Legal advice is given in reports for all decisions to be taken by Members.
Core Principle 2: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	
Openness	• The Council is committed to openness and holds meetings in public wherever it can. A schedule of Council meetings is available on the Council's website. • The agendas, reports and minutes of meetings are published on the Council's website. All reports contain details of options considered and the advice provided by officers regarding legal and financial implications. The minutes include the reasons behind the decisions made. • All reports are considered by Leadership Team and subject to internal challenge and assessment before being passed to Members for consideration. • The Council has a Freedom of Information Scheme in place and seeks to publish information openly on its website wherever possible and practicable to do so.

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Sub Principles	Arrangements the Council has in place
Engaging with stakeholders effectively, including individual citizens and service users	• The Council communicates with its citizens, service users and stakeholders via our website, social media and press releases. • The Council consults and engages with its community on key issues such as priorities, the budget, new projects. We do this through on-line and paper surveys, in person meetings, etc. • Wherever we seek the views of our community, we endeavour to provide feedback on the information received and how we have used this to shape the Council's decisions.
Core Principle 3: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits	
Defining outcomes	• The Council has established a clear vision of what it wants to achieve and this is set out in the Corporate Plan.
Ensuring Value for Money	• The Council's Financial Regulations and Procurement Regulations provide a framework to ensure that value for money, best value and social value is considered in the delivery of services and projects. • Key decisions are made by Cabinet or Council. All reports require financial implications and value for money to be considered when taking decisions.
Fair access to services	• Equality impact assessments are undertaken for all new policies to ensure fair access to services.
Working with Partners	• The Council works closely with partners (ie other public sector bodies, the voluntary sector and the private sector) to deliver agreed outcomes for the community.
Core Principle 4: Determining the interventions necessary to achieve the intended outcomes	
Arrangements for short and medium term planning	• The Corporate Plan is underpinned by Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs) which set out a range of targeted actions and projects to help to achieve the Council's vision; these are reviewed and updated annually. • The Council's day to day services also support the delivery of the vision and priorities.
Managing performance	• The performance in delivering the Council's priorities and key operational services is monitored by the Leadership Team, Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committees. • Performance in delivering day to day services is monitored by Service Managers.
Alignment of budget with corporate priorities	• The Medium-Term Financial Strategy takes the Council's priorities into consideration when budget setting. In year, any financial decisions are required to demonstrate a contribution to the one or more of the Council's priorities.

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Sub Principles	Arrangements the Council has in place
Core Principle 5: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	
Developing the Council's capacity and the capability of its Leadership and the individuals within it	• The roles of Members, Committees, Officers and Statutory Officers are set out in the Council's Constitution, which is available on the Council's website. • The Council has a Scheme of Delegations in place, as part of the Constitution, which sets out the types of decisions and who can make them within the Council. • The Council's Chief Executive acts as the Head of Paid Service. • The Deputy Chief Executive for Resources acts as the Chief Finance (s151) Officer. • The Head of Law and Governance acts as the Monitoring Officer. • All three statutory officers meet regularly to discuss and address any governance issues • An induction programme is in place to provide training and support for all new Members and employees. • The ongoing development of Members is led by the political groups but access to training is also made available through the Council. • Employees have an annual employee review to assess their progress, performance and to identify any training and development needs. • The Council is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of the workforce through appropriate HR policies, working practices and access to an Occupational Health Service.
Core Principle 6: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	
Managing risk	• The Council has a risk management policy and strategy in place. • A Strategic Risk Register is maintained by the Leadership Team and progress is monitored by the Cabinet and the Audit and Accounts Committee. • Operational risks are identified and managed within the respective service areas. • Framework in place to manage Health and Safety risks
Strong public financial management	• The s151 Officer, ie Chief Financial Officer, is appropriately qualified, experienced and complies with the Cipfa Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government. • The s151 Officer ensures that arrangements are in place to

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Sub Principles	Arrangements the Council has in place
	comply with the Financial Management Code. • The s151 Officer prepares and advises the Council on it's Medium Term Financial Strategy and the budget. • Officers have access to real time budget information and twice yearly budget monitoring reports are provided to Members and Officers. • Financial Regulations provide a framework for the day to day management of the Council's financial transactions.
Internal Audit and Internal Control	• The internal control framework comprises a range of policies and procedures to ensure the sound management of the Council's operations and delivery of services. • The Internal Audit Section undertakes reviews of the systems that comprise the internal control and governance framework, provides assurance and makes recommendations for improvement. • The Audit and Accounts Committee receives reports from the Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager on the systems that comprise the internal control framework. The Committee also monitors the performance and quality of the Internal Audit service to ensure that it complies with the required national standards. • Internal Audit arrangements are in conformance with the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector. These are reviewed annually and reported to the Audit and Accounts Committee. • The Internal Audit Section provides assurances throughout the year on the key systems of internal control. • An annual review is undertaken of the Council's governance arrangements. • Procurement Regulations provide a framework for managing the procurement of goods and services by the Council
Assurance and Scrutiny	• The Audit and Accounts Committee receives assurance from the Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager on: ➢ the effective operation of the internal control framework; and ➢ the management of strategic risks. • The Scrutiny Committees monitor the performance of the Council and hold the Cabinet to account for the decisions it makes. Each Scrutiny Committee has oversight of one or more of the Council's priorities.

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Sub Principles	Arrangements the Council has in place
Managing data and IT security	• The Council has a Data Protection Officer and Information Governance policy in place to ensure that personal data is held securely and managed appropriately. • The Council has an IT security policy in place and a Cyber Security Officer to ensure the integrity and security of the systems and data.
	• Annual refresher training on Data Protection and Cyber Security is mandated for all employees.
Core Principle 7: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability	
Implementing good practice in transparency and reporting to ensure effective accountability	• The Council is committed to maintaining a pro-active working relationship with external audit, internal audit and other inspection/regulatory bodies. • From time to time, the Council invites/ receives reviews of its services and develops improvement plans to implement recommendations arising from them. These are discussed with Leadership Team and progress is reported to Cabinet, the Audit and Accounts Committee or Scrutiny Committee as appropriate. • The following information is reported annually to Members and is available on the Council's website: ➢ Performance in delivering the Council's priorities and operational performance of key services; ➢ Statement of Accounts; ➢ Annual Internal Audit Report; ➢ Annual External Audit Letter; and ➢ Annual Governance Statement. • The Council has a compliments and complaints policy and a summary is reported annually to the Resources Scrutiny Committee.

2.2 A diagram illustrating the Council's Governance Framework is given at Annex 1.

3. MONITORING AND REPORTING

3.1 The authority will undertake an annual review of its governance arrangements to ensure continuing compliance with best practice as set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework. The review will include a range of perspectives from different sources of assurance eg statutory officers, management, corporate functions such as risk management, internal audit, external audit and other independent review bodies.

3.2 The review will be reported on both within the authority, to the Audit and Accounts Committee, and externally with the published accounts, to provide assurance that:

- corporate governance arrangements are adequate and operating effectively in practice; or
- where reviews of the corporate governance arrangements have revealed gaps, action is planned that will ensure effective governance in future.

3.3 The authority will prepare an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and in so doing recognises that the process of preparing the Governance Statement should itself add value to the authority's corporate governance and internal control framework. It will be submitted to the Audit and Accounts Committee for consideration and approval.

3.4 The Annual Governance Statement will include the following information:

- a summary of the annual review and an overall opinion on the effectiveness of the governance arrangements;
- a brief description of how the review of effectiveness has been conducted and the results of this;
- an opinion on whether there are adequate governance arrangements in place and operating effectively;
- an outline of the areas that need to be improved, any significant governance failures and an action plan the address these issues; and
- improvements made to governance arrangements during the year.

3.4 The Audit and Accounts Committee will be responsible for considering and approving the Annual Governance Statement. The statement will be signed by the Chair of the Audit and Accounts Committee, the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

3.5 The AGS will be reported to full Council as part of the annual report on the work of the Audit and Accounts Committee.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 Corporate governance and good governance is everyone's responsibility. There are however a number of specific responsibilities in relation to the implementation, monitoring and review of the Code and activities associated with the production of the annual governance statement. These are outlined below.

4.2 **The Chief Executive and the Leadership Team** will be responsible for:

- Championing and role modelling good governance, in the spirit of this Code.

4.3 **The Deputy Chief Executive for Resources (s151 Officer)** will be responsible for:

- overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the Code.

4.4 **The Head of Law and Governance (the Monitoring Officer)** will be responsible for:

- reviewing the operation of the Code and advising on any changes that may be necessary to maintain it and ensure its effectiveness in practice; and
- reviewing and updating the Code of Corporate Governance as necessary.

4.5 **The Head of Business Support and Assurance** will be responsible for:

- undertaking an annual review of the Code, to provide assurance on the extent of compliance with it.
- co-ordinating the Council's assurances processes; and
- co-ordinating the production of an AGS which will represent the overall levels of assurance within the Council on behalf of all Members and officers.

4.6 **The Chief Internal Auditor** will be responsible for:

- reporting annually to the Audit and Accounts Committee on audit activities during the year, with particular emphasis on the systems of internal control and the arrangements for corporate governance, providing some of the assurance required in the Annual Governance Statement.

Appendix 1

CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Glossary

Term	Explanation
CIPFA	The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy;
SOLACE	The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers
Member	Elected councillor (including co-opted councillors)
Officer	Employee of the Council (including secondees)
Section 151 Officer	The statutory officer responsible for reporting on matters of financial compliance
Monitoring Officer	The statutory officer responsible for reporting on matters of legality
Constitution	The Council’s rules and codes/protocols book

Appendix 1: Annex 1

GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Principle 1 Integrity and Ethics	Principle 2 Openness and Engagement	Principle 3 Vision and Outcomes	Principle 4 Delivering Intended Outcomes	Principle 5 Capacity and Capability	Principle 6 Risk, Control and Finance	Principle 7 Assurance and Accountability
• Values and Behaviours • Code of Conduct for Members • Code of Conduct for Employees • Declarations of Interests • Gifts and Hospitality Policy and Registers • Speaking Up Policy • Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy • Member and Officer Protocol • Standards Committee • Monitoring Officer • Legal advice in Committees	• Schedule of Council meetings • Council agendas, reports and minutes of meetings • Freedom of Information Scheme • Website, Social Media, Press Releases • Consultation and Engagement (Surveys etc)	• Corporate Plan • Financial Regulations • Procurement Regulations • Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy • Equality Impact Assessments	• Priority Delivery Plans • Key Performance Indicators • Business/Service Plans • Performance Reports • Project Governance and Reporting • Medium Term Financial Strategy	• Constitution • Member and Officer Relationships Protocol • Scheme of Delegations • Induction Programmes • Employee Reviews • Training • Statutory Officers	• Risk Management Policy and Strategy • Risk Registers • Financial Regulations • Budget and MTFS • Budget reports • Performance Reports • Procurement Regulations • HR Policies and Procedures • Health andSafety Policies • Audit Plan • Audit Reports • ICT Policies • Data Protection Policy • Treasury Management Policy • S151 Officer	• Code of Governance • Annual Governance Statement (AGS) • Annual Internal Audit Report • Annual External Audit Letter • Statement of Accounts • Council Tax Leaflet • Pay Policy Statement • Performance Reports • Audit Committee • Scrutiny Committees • Internal Audit • External Audit • Compliments and Complaints Policy

Stafford Borough Council

Annual Governance Statement 2025-26

Introduction

1.1 General

Stafford Borough Council (the Council) is accountable to the residents of the Borough and other stakeholders for ensuring a sound system of governance is in place. Good governance underpins delivery of the Council's operational services and priorities, as set out in the Corporate Plan, and provides confidence that decisions are well made.

It supports ethical working and public accountability. This Annual Governance Statement (AGS) provides assurance on the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements and compliance with the principles set out in the Cipfa/Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework.

The AGS, informed by the annual review, is structured to provide:

- An Executive Summary - providing the key messages of the AGS and an overall opinion as to whether governance arrangements at the Council are fit for purpose.
- An Assessment of Effectiveness - outlining how the review of effectiveness was conducted and the key findings.
- Improvements to Governance Arrangements - identifying those areas of governance requiring improvement and how these are being addressed, and how we have improved our governance arrangements based on issues identified in last year's AGS and other significant steps taken to improve governance during the year.
- A Forward Look on Governance - identifying where governance needs to change or develop to meet the future needs of the Council.

This AGS covers the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. But the review of the effectiveness of our governance arrangements remains an on-going process.

1.2 Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and for maintaining robust arrangements for risk management, control and governance, ensuring continuous improvement in service delivery.

Elected members have overall responsibility for the governance of the Council and for the fulfilment of accountabilities to residents of the Borough and other stakeholders. Approval of core governance arrangements such as the Council Constitution is made by full Council whereas other aspects of governance are approved through delegated authority. The Council has delegated authority for approval of the AGS to the Audit and Accounts Committee.

The Council has three key statutory officers with specific governance responsibilities, being the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), Deputy Chief Executive – Resources and s151 Officer (Chief Financial Officer), and the Head of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer). The Head of Business Support and Assurance works with the statutory officers to put in place and maintain the appropriate arrangements for governance and provide assurance on its effectiveness.

All members of the Leadership Team share responsibility for the accuracy of the AGS. The Head of Business Support and Assurance is responsible for the preparation of the AGS and for its submission to the Audit and Accounts Committee for approval following agreement of the Leadership Team.

2 Executive summary

2.1 Achievements

The Council has made significant progress in developing and improving its overall governance framework during the year. Key achievements have included:

- Reviewing and updating the Code of Governance;
- Updating key documents which form part of the Council's governance framework eg Code of Conduct for Employees, IT security policy, the Anti-Fraudand Bribery and Speaking Up policies;
- Training for Leadership Team, service managers and principal officers in risk management and the development of the risk registers;
- Training on procurement and the new regulations.

2.2 Priorities for the Coming Year

Whilst the Council is making progress with its governance improvements, we recognise that more work still needs to be done. Our priorities for improvement in the coming year include:

- Embedding the new Code of Governance and raising its profile;
- Development of an assurance model;
- Rolling out the new Code of Conduct for Employees and Values across the Council;

- Development of work plans and a performance reporting framework for Leadership Team;
- Developing a culture of ownership and accountability, particularly in financial and performance management, across the Council;
- Project management training and improvements to project governance.

2.3 Opinion on the Council's Governance Arrangements

Based on the review of effectiveness and our understanding and experience of the governance arrangements in place during 2025-26 and to date, our overall opinion is that the Council's governance framework, including the system of internal control, is limited.

The framework itself is generally adequate. Whilst there are some gaps in the framework, the main concern is that it is not fully embedded or operating effectively across the Council.

Policies and guidance are not always followed. It is recognised that a number of key policies have been updated in the year and training has not yet been rolled out; these will take time to embed. Compliance with other policies is inconsistent and this is due in part to due to a lack of awareness and in part a lack of accountability. Limited resources is having an impact on the capacity to provide regular updates, reminders and training.

Areas for improvement have been identified and an action plan is in place to address these issues. The Council continues to make progress on the improvement journey and has recently updated the Code of Governance. But it is recognised that further work is needed to ensure that effective systems of internal control, governance and risk management are fully developed, embedded and consistently applied across the organisation. We remain committed to delivering these improvements and will monitor their implementation and effectiveness through our ongoing governance review processes.

Signed on behalf of Stafford Borough Council:

Chair of the Audit and Accounts Committee:

Leader of the Council:

Chief Executive:

Date of approval

3 Assessment of Effectiveness

3.1 Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community.

Key components of the framework include:

- Strategic vision and priorities articulated through the Corporate Plan;
- The Constitution of the Council that sets out how the Council operates, makes decisions, and ensures accountability through its governance, rules and procedures. It is the primary governance document of the Council and includes codes of conduct and core financial rules that must be followed;
- Scrutiny arrangements, and openness such as through public access to meetings and published agendas, consultation and community engagement and publication of Council information, that support challenge, transparency and accountability;
- Corporate policies covering expected behaviours including for anti-fraud and whistleblowing (speaking up) and information governance;
- Arrangements in place for the discharge of statutory officer functions;
- Robust financial management including the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Financial planning is aligned with strategic objectives to provide long-term sustainability;
- Business planning and performance management arrangements which translate the corporate priorities into priority delivery plans (PDPs) and key performance indicators to measure our delivery of key operational services;
- Risk management arrangements overseen by the Leadership Team and the Audit and Accounts Committee. The system of internal control is a significant part of this framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. It can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.

3.2 Local Code of Governance

The Council's Local Code of Governance has adopted the seven Good Governance framework principles of:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law;
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;

- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits;
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes;
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it;
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management;
- Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

The Code has been updated recently to meet the requirements of the addendum issued by Cipfa/Solace.

3.3 Review of Effectiveness

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. This provides an open and honest assessment of the Council's governance arrangements. The review draws on a broad range of assurances to evaluate whether governance arrangements are fit for purpose, operating effectively, and to identify areas for improvement including developments to best meet future demands and anticipated change.

This year a key element of the review of effectiveness has been a self-assessment against the Cipfa/Solace Guidance and the local Code of Corporate Governance, undertaken by the Head of Business Support and Assurance. This review has in turn has been informed by:

- Member scrutiny and challenge processes - an annual report on scrutiny activity has been completed and will be presented to Council on 21 July 2026.
- The Standards Committee provides oversight of the complaints procedure for responding to alleged failures to comply with the Members' Code of Conduct. The Council Monitoring Officer provides support, advice, and maintains the effectiveness of the Standards Committee and the standards regime.
- The Audit and Accounts Committee operates independently of the Executive and plays a key role in oversight of the operation of the Council's governance framework.

- Leadership Team - met regularly throughout 2025/26 and provided on-going management and oversight of the activities of the Council. Leadership Team is chaired by the Chief Executive and consists of the most senior Council Officers. Leadership Team input to and provide scrutiny of the AGS prior to its submission to Audit and Accounts Committee;

- Assurances from the Statutory Officers - the Head of Paid Service, the Chief Financial Officer and the Monitoring Officer have met and considered the arrangements in place to support the seven principles in the Council's Local Code of Governance.

- The work of Internal Audit and the Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager's Annual Conclusion - Internal Audit examine the effectiveness of the Council's internal controls, risk management and corporate governance arrangements. Assurance is provided through periodic monitoring reports to the Audit and Accounts Committee, together with the annual Internal Audit opinion on internal control, risk management and governance, informed through delivery of a risk based Annual Audit Plan. For 2025/26, "Internal Audit can provide **Limited assurance** that the Council's governance arrangements including risk management and systems of internal control were operating adequately and there were no instances where any breakdown of control resulted in a material discrepancy."

- The work of External Audit and the annual report and opinion - The Council's external auditors, Azets, provide assurance on the accuracy of the year-end Statement of Accounts and the overall adequacy of arrangements for securing and improving value for money. The value for money statement for 2024/25 was issued in June 2026 and this showed an improvement in the Council's governance arrangements compared to previous years.

➢ A review of disciplinary investigations undertaken during the year indicates a lack of awareness and compliance with the Council's policies and procedures, and a lack of understanding of standards of conduct and behaviour.

Based on the review of effectiveness and our experience of the governance arrangements in place during 2025-26 and to date, our overall opinion is that the Council's governance framework, including the system of internal control, is limited. The framework itself is generally adequate and is designed to support the seven key principles of good governance, but there are some gaps in it. The main concern is that key elements of the framework are not fully embedded or operating effectively across the Council.

In particular, policies and guidance are not always followed. It is recognised that a number of key policies have been updated in the year and training has not yet been rolled out; these will take time to embed. Compliance with other policies is inconsistent and this is due in part to due to a lack of awareness and in part a lack of accountability. Limited resources is having an impact on the capacity to provide regular updates, reminders and training.

The overall opinion is based on the evidence outlined in this review, together with the combined understandings of Leadership Team resulting in their recommendation to, and the agreement of, the Audit and Accounts Committee.

4 Improvements to Governance Arrangements

4.1 Identification of Governance Issues

Our review is required to identify any areas of governance requiring improvement where:

- there are significant gaps in governance arrangements such as where core arrangements are not operating effectively;
- significant governance issues (failures) occurred during the year;
- governance arrangements could be easier to understand, comply with or made more efficient, and where there are barriers to achieving the principles of good governance.

Where our governance needs to improve

Our review of the Council's governance arrangements has identified the following key issues as needing to be addressed in 2026/27.

- Embedding the new Code of Governance and raising its profile;
- Development of an assurance model;
- Rolling out the new Code of Conduct for Employees and Values across the Council;
- Development of work plans and a performance reporting framework for Leadership Team;
- Developing a culture of ownership and accountability, particularly in relation to financial and performance management;
- Project management training and improvements to project governance.

A comprehensive action plan outlining the improvements to be made for each of the core principles of the Code of Governance is set out in Annex 2.

4.2 How we have improved our governance arrangements in 2025-26

A summary of the key areas where improvements have been made in addressing the governance issues identified in last year's AGS are outlined below.

- Reviewing and updating the Code of Governance;
- Updating key documents which form part of the Council's governance framework eg Code of Conduct for Employees, IT security policy, the Anti-Fraudand Bribery and Speaking Up policies;

- Training for Leadership Team, service managers and principal officers in risk management and the development of the risk registers;
- Training on procurement and the new regulations.

The significant nature of some of the improvement activities identified in last year's AGS necessitates a timeframe spanning more than a year to implement and achieve their objectives. Where appropriate ongoing and outstanding actions have been carried forward into the improvement plan for 2026/27.

4.3 Forward Look on Governance

The review has included a forward look on governance to identify where governance may need to change or develop to meet the future needs of the Council.

5.1 Significant risks or uncertainties that may change or challenge governance in future years

The Council recognises and monitors its key risks through risk management processes in place. Key risks linked to governance include:

- Financial Stability
- Local Government Re-organisation
- IT Resilience
- Failure to deliver good governance
- Corporate Capacity is insufficient to maintain provision of core services and deliver major projects
- Health and Safety arrangements for people
- Safety and compliance arrangements for corporate properties.

The actions to address these risks are set out in the Strategic Risk Register and will be monitored by Cabinet and the Audit and Accounts Committee. Some of the actions are also included in the Governance Improvement Plan.

5.2 Other issues

Other issues identified during the review include:

- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will see the abolition of the existing 2 tier system of local government in Staffordshire and its replacement with unitary Councils. This will generate significant work, change and uncertainty for the coming years. Whilst this is referred to in the section above, the risk focusses on the impact on service delivery during the transition period. There is however also the risk that the Council's governance arrangements during this time could fragment or deteriorate as resources are stretched and attention is focussed elsewhere. This will be monitored and managed through the delivery of the governance improvement plan, the introduction of assurance statements and the annual review of effectiveness. Whilst our resources are stretched it is important that we prepare for the transition to the new Council and a plan of preparatory activities is being developed. As our workforce is at the heart of everything the Council does, it is essential that we prepare them too and our Employee Review process is to be refreshed and relaunched to assist with this.

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) - the capability and application of AI continues to develop. and the Council needs to adapt to the rapidly evolving technology that brings both opportunities and threats to efficient service delivery. A policy is to be developed to provide a framework for the Council's use of AI across its functions and to provide guidance to employees;

4.4 AGS Action Plan / Governance Improvement Plan

We have identified areas of our governance arrangements which require improvement and these are set out in an improvement plan in Annex 2. The plan is structured to identify the actions needed to improve each of the core principles of the Code of Governance.

The plan provides a summary of the work required to address the significant governance issues in the coming year and beyond where necessary. The improvement plan includes:

- Outstanding issues reported in the previous 2024/25 AGS;
- Issues identified during the 2025/26 review; and
- Actions to respond to the External Auditors recommendations from the 2024/25 Value for Money review

These ongoing significant governance issues will be monitored and reported on quarterly to the Audit and Accounts Committee as part of the annual governance review process.

Governance Improvement Plan for 2026-27

Appendix 2: Annex 2

No	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale
1	**Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**		
1.1	**Behaving with Integrity** - Code of Conduct for Employees and Values to be rolled out across the Council and awareness training provided	Head of Business Support and Assurance	Rollout in Quarter 1 Training in Quarter 2
1.2	**Ethical Values** - Update the Anti-Fraud and Bribery Framework and the Confidential Reporting Framework **(External Audit - Significant Recommendation 2)**	Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager	Completed April 2026
1.3	**Ethical Values** - Develop a fraud risk register (Outstanding action from 25/26)	Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager	Quarter 2
1.4	**Ethical Values** - declaration of conflict of interests - awareness to be raise and annual review to be built into Employee Review process	Head of Business Support and Assurance / HR Manager	Quarter 1 - awareness raising Quarter 2 - Employee Review process
1.5	**Respecting the rule of law** - managers checks on compliance with the law and local policies/guidance needs to be evidenced. Guidance on this to be issued	Head of Business Support and Assurance / Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager	Quarter 3
2	**Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**		
2.1	Openness - Checklist to be introduced to ensure that Legal, Financial and HR implications in committee reports are completed and signed off by the relevant professional officers	Head of Law and Governance	Quarter 2
2.2	Reports which are not coming to Leadership Team for consideration prior to going to Cabinet, Council etc must be identified and agreement reached in advance - to be embedded into sign-off checklist (action above)	Leadership Team	Quarter 2

No	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale
2.3	Engaging with Stakeholders - plan of key consultation for next 2 years to be developed	Communications Manager	Quarter 2 - dependent on Leadership Team completing work plans
3.	**Defining the vision and outcomes for the local area and determining the actions necessary to achieve the intended outcomes**		
3.1	**Ensuring VFM** - Put in place a formal SLA with Staffs County Council re the shared procurement arrangements Due to the advent of LGR, this is not deemed a priority. Working practices have been in place for several years and this will continue for the foreseeable future. Should LGR be delayed then this will be revisited. **External Audit - Other Recommendation 4)**	Head of Business Support and Assurance	**No further action**
3.2	**Ensuring VFM** - Provide regular reports to Members on single tender waivers. Waivers to be reported on to the Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee quarterly. **External Audit - Other Recommendation 4)**	Head of Law and Governance	Quarter 1 onwards
3.3	**Ensuring VFM** - Update the contracts register and ensure it is compliant with transparency requirements - to be updated as part of the preparations for LGR. This will also include the development of a plan of those contracts which need to be re-tendered in the next 2 years. **External Audit - Other Recommendation 4)**	Head of Business Support and Assurance and Leadership Team	Quarter 1 Quarter 2
3.4	**Fair access to services** - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Equality Impact Assessment Template and guidance to be updated and training provided	Head of Business Support and Assurance and HR Manager	Quarter 2

No	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale
4.	**Determining the interventions necessary to achieve the intended outcomes**		
4.1	**Performance Management -** Develop a data quality policy or similar process for providing assurance on KPIS as part of performance management reporting Whilst it is acknowledged that it would be useful to have a data quality policy, in light of limited capacity and LGR it has been agreed not to implement this recommendation. It would take several months to develop the policy and would at best have 18 months of use, assuming that LGR proceeds to the current timetable. **(External Audit - Other Recommendation 3)**	Head of Business Support and Assurance	**No further action**
4.2	Develop work plans for all Heads of Service for the next 2 years to manage the lead up to LGR. To include the development of a performance reporting framework for Leadership Team (Outstanding action from 25/26)	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and Deputy Chief Executive (Place)	Quarter 1
4.3	Review of service delivery information (KPIs) and approach to service improvements to identify what information is being collected and to assess and fill any key gaps.	Head of Business Support and Assurance and Leadership Team	Quarter 3
4.4	Facilitated session with Leadership Team to progress developing a culture of ownership and accountability.	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer and Head of Business Support and Assurance	Quarter 3
4.5	Provide training for key officers (LT, Service Managers and relevant Principal Officers/Team Leaders) on project management. (Outstanding action from 25/26)	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer and Head of Business Support and Assurance	Quarter 2

Governance Improvement Plan for 2026-27

Appendix 2: Annex 2

No	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale
5.	**Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**		
5.1	Statutory Officer (Golden Triangle) meetings to be formally established with an agenda designed to cover governance issues	Deputy Chief Executive - Resources	Quarter 1
5.2	Employee induction process to be refreshed	HR Manager	Quarter 3
5.3	Employee review process to be refreshed and relaunched	HR Manager	Quarter 2
5.4	Complete review of hybrid working and develop a hybrid working policy. (Outstanding action from 25/26)	Head of Business Support and Assurance and HR Manager	Quarter 2
6.	**Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**		
6.4	**Risk Management** • Put in place directorate/departmental risk registers for all service areas • Risk registers to be subject to regular review to ensure mitigating actions are being taken - to be done quarterly • Process to be put in place to escalate risks to the strategic risk register where appropriate - ant significant risks identified from the quarterly reviews will be reported to Leadership Team for inclusion in the Strategic Risk Register (External Audit - Other Recommendation 2)	Head of Business Support and Assurance, Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager and Leadership Team	Quarter 2
6.5	Deliver the health and safety action plan which aims to embed a pro-active Health and Safety culture. The key actions include: • Update the overarching Health and Safety Policy • Deliver targeted training to Leadership Team and Managers • Determine a programme for reviewing and updating HandS policies	Head of Business Support and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager	 Quarter 2 Quarter 2 Quarter 3

No	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale
6.1	**Financial Management** - Ensure adequate capacity in the Finance Team - efforts will continue to recruit to vacancies in the Finance Team and/ or to continue to use agency staff where appropriate. Ensure that budget holders receive formal financial monitoring reports - it is unlikely that the resourcing situation will improve sufficiently to increase reporting from half yearly to quarterly. Produce draft financial statements in line with statutory requirements and work with external auditors to deliver the audits effectively (External Audit - Significant Recommendation 1)	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources)	Quarter 2 - End of Summer 2026
6.2	**Financial Management** - Review the need to implement further savings ahead of LGR given the potential funding gaps identified in26/27 and 27/28 as a result of changes to the financial settlement after the MTFS and 26/27 budgets were approved in January 26 Due to the high uncertainty around the settlement and the previous late interventions by central government to ensure no decrease in core funding, a savings programme is not deemed appropriate for 2026/27 at this stage. There are sufficient reserves in place to be able to prudently adopt this approach should central government not change the current settlement amounts. (External Audit - Other Recommendation 1)	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources)	**No further action**
6.3	Review of Financial Regulations and training for managers (Outstanding action from 2025/26)	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) and S151 Officer	Quarter 2
6.6	Develop a structured approach / framework to the management of corporate assets	Head of Housing and Corporate Assets and Corporate Asset Manager	

No	Action	Lead Officer	Revised Timescale
6.7	**Assurance and Scrutiny** - Development of Assurance Model, to include: • Annual Assurance Report for Health and Safety • Annual Assurance Report for Technology • Heads of Service Assurance Statements (Outstanding action from 2025/26)	Head of Business Support and Assurance and Chief Internal Auditor and Risk Manager	• Quarter 2 • Quarter 1 • Quarter 1
6.9	**Data and IT Security -** AI policy to be developed	Technology Manager	Quarter 2
6.10	**Data and IT Security** - Ensure that annual refresher training is undertaken	Technology Manager / Data Protection Officer	Quarter 4
7.	**Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability**		
7.1	Develop a lessons learnt approach eg from projects and complaints. Initial discussion to be held with Leadership Team to establish any current best practice and build on this	Head of Business Support and Assurance and Leadership Team	Quarter 3
8.	**General / Other**		
8.1	Training and reminders for managers on good governance and key components of the framework (Outstanding action from 2025/26)	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources), Head of Business Support and Assurance and Head of Law and Governance	Quarter 2

Agenda Item 10

Annual Scrutiny Business Report

Committee:	Council
Date of Meeting:	21 July 2026
Report of:	Head of Law and Governance
Portfolio:	Leader of the Council

The following matter was considered by the various Scrutiny Committees and is submitted to Council as required.

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To report the business conducted by Scrutiny Committees over 2025/26.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That Council note the report and the work of Scrutiny over 2025/26.

Reasons for Recommendations

2.2 To make Council aware of the scrutiny activity that has been undertaken over the last municipal year.

3 Key Issues

3.1 Scrutiny is an important function in every council operating executive arrangements. It is important that members understand the role of scrutiny and that Council is kept informed of the work undertaken by Scrutiny Committees.

3.2 This report provides a summary of the work undertaken by each committee over the last municipal year. Full details of committee agendas and reports can be found on the Councils website.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

4.1 Good scrutiny can enhance decision making across all Council priorities. In particular it supports Priority 4: Effective Council through providing good customer experience, value for money to local taxpayers and good governance across the Council.

5 Report Detail

5.1 The Council operates Executive arrangements through the election of a Leader and Cabinet. Every local authority operating Executive arrangements is required to establish at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee to act as a check and balance to the Executive.

5.2 Scrutiny Committees are cross party committees each reflecting the overall political balance of the Council. They are not decision making bodies, but allow elected members who do not sit on the Cabinet to scrutinise and influence Executive decision making. This can take the form of scrutinising decisions that Cabinet are planning to take (policy review and development), those it plans to implement (through use of call-in procedures) and those that have already been implemented (through performance review).

5.3 National guidance advises that scrutiny work should be based upon four principles. It should:

- Provide constructive “critical friend” challenge
- Reflect the voices and concerns of the public
- Be led independently by members who take responsibility for their role, and
- Drive improvement in services and strategic decision making

5.4 The Council has established three scrutiny committees, each with its own terms of reference and areas of oversight. The three areas are Resources, Economic Development and Planning and Community Wellbeing. Details of each committee’s remit, and the procedure rules for the scrutiny function, are set out in the Council’s Constitution.

<u>Performance Review</u>

5.5 Each committee regularly monitors Council performance, within its area of scrutiny, through the review of quarterly performance information. Information reported includes progress against delivery plans and key performance indicators, and enables members to identify whether the Council is achieving its corporate plan objectives. Effective monitoring helps the Council to identify good and poor performance and to take action where needed to put things right.

5.6 Senior officers attend committee meetings to answer any questions, or respond to requests for clarification, and committees have the power to call senior officers and Cabinet members to account.

5.7 In addition to playing an important role in reviewing performance, each committee sets its own scrutiny work programme for the year. The following additional scrutiny work was carried out by each committee during 2025/26.

<u>Resources</u>

5.8 The Resources Scrutiny Committee reviewed the draft General Fund Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Fees and Charges, prior to consideration by full Council at its Budget meetings.

5.9 The Committee set up a task and finish group to conduct the annual review of the Council's constitution. A number of proposals were considered, including an update to the Code of Conduct for Employees and the committee recommendations were adopted by full Council in April 2026.

5.10 A further task and finish working group was set up regarding the revenues and benefits debt collection process. This concluded in March 2026 and the Committee have supported the review and are recommending to Cabinet in May that the project to review older debts be continued into the 2026-27 financial year, subject to a review on a 6-monthly basis by the Section 151 Officer on the ongoing effectiveness.

5.11 The Committee reviewed the performance of corporate complaints handling over 2025/26, including monitoring details of any complaints referred to the Ombudsman over that period.

5.12 The committee scrutinised the End of Year Performance Report for 2024/25 and asked for clarity regarding the current Fire Risk Assessment as the KPI had not been met. The Head of Service reported back to the next scrutiny committee detailing progress that had been made.

Economic Development and Planning

5.13 In light of the significant volume of regeneration work currently being undertaken by the Council, the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee held a number of meetings to review updates on Regeneration Projects within Stafford town, including the Stafford Town Masterplan, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Business Growth programme and the Stafford Station Gateway project.

5.14 The Committee received a presentation from the Visitor Economy Partnership Development Manager, Staffordshire County Council on the work of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). Members asked officers to review the proposed LVEP list of priorities for Stafford Borough and to bring the outcome of this work back to a future committee for consideration. Members also received an update on the successful UKREiF event where a number of developers and investors showed interest in the regeneration of Stafford's High Street.

5.15 Members were informed of the publication of the Infrastructure Funding Statement 2024/25 which relates to section 106 funding. It is a legal duty to produce the statement and is required to be published by December each year. Members requested that a further item be brought back to Scrutiny to review how Ward Members and communities can be more effectively engaged when determining open space provision in their localities.

5.16 The Committee received updates on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and its effect on the Local Plan.

5.17 Following a Council notice of motion titled Protecting Our Rivers and Oceans, an additional scrutiny committee took place where stakeholders were invited to present to the committee to answer the questions that had been raised. Members received presentations from Severn Trent Water and the Internal Drainage Board. Severn Trent Water agreed to provide further information on its 5 year investment plan, reservoir expansions and website which show information on sewage and flooding within the Borough. Members agreed that a letter should be sent to the local MP requesting that water authorities and IDBs should become statutory consultees in planning applications. The committee also requested that Cabinet should review the original motion and present an update to Council before the end of the year.

5.18 A representative from Mondrem visited the scrutiny committee to provide information on the review of the Development Management service and to give an overview of the Enforcement Policy. There was a Members Item regarding backlogs in planning and planning enforcement which led to the Enforcement Policy being looked at again in further detail at a subsequent meeting. Members asked officers to write to the Government to highlight concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of Enforcement staff and the inability of the Council to enforce effectively against Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Members requested that officers set up a refresher BNG workshop.

5.19 The Committee also received a presentation on Renewable Energy, sharing examples of appeals, and concluding that each application site is judged on its own merits.

5.20 A report was received regarding heritage and conservation within the Borough. Members requested that Cabinet identify resources to enable the introduction of a Local Heritage Assets List. The Conservation Officer also offered to host a workshop with members to looking at identified and emerging historic assets. This topic will be revisited at a future meeting.

5.21 The Committee set up a task and finish group to look at the evening and night time economy. The group will continue to meet and provide feedback to the scrutiny committee.

5.22 A joint Economic Development and Planning and Resources Scrutiny Committee was held to discuss S106 monies. All members were invited to attend.

<u>Community Wellbeing</u>

5.23 The statutory overview and scrutiny function for Staffordshire is undertaken by Staffordshire County Council’s Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In accordance with good practice, and to ensure co-ordinated scrutiny of local health matters between councils, the Chair of the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee is also a member of the County Council committee and a member of the County Council scrutiny is appointed to the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. The committee has a standing agenda item where it receives reports from the County Scrutiny alerting it to any health matters being scrutinised.

5.24 In addition to monitoring local health matters, the committee held meetings to review matters including the strong performance of the Disabled Facilities Grants service and received an update on the work of the Councils Streetscene services and the changes that had taken place over the last year. Members of the committee asked a series of questions of the Council's Streetscene Manager about the current service provision during his presentation.

5.25 The committee also reviewed the work carried out by the Councils external contractors for Leisure, Culture and Heritage Services and Waste Collection, through receipt of their annual reports. A presentation was received on the work of the Social Housing Provider "Housing Plus" in the Borough. Housing Plus are the largest housing provider in the Borough owning 80% of the social housing stock and in January 2025 merged with Wrekin Housing Association. The presentation triggered wide ranging discussion on housing and neighbourhood issues that were important for residents in the Borough. The Committee asked the Chair to write to the Council's waste collection contractor to pass on its sincere gratitude for the work of its employees within the borough area over the previous 12 months.

5.26 The committee received a presentation from representatives of the Community Wellbeing Partnership regarding work carried out in respect of reducing crime and disorder and tackling health inequalities within the Borough over the year.

5.27 The committee set up a task and finish group to look at the topic of Food Waste. The group met several times and included a visit from a neighbouring authority that had been collecting food waste for several years. Over a period of several months the group reviewed national, regional, and industry data; reviewed and made recommendations on the proposed communication with the public, and ultimately influenced the shaping of the new service across the borough.

5.28 The committee received one called-in item, referred to it under the Councils scrutiny call-in arrangements. This related to the Cabinet's decision to adopt an Events Policy. The policy was scrutinised with the Head of Operations in attendance around its intension, following which the Committee expressed their satisfaction and no further action was recommended.

Future Work Programme

5.29 Each committee sets its initial annual work programme at the first business meeting of the new municipal year, taking into account any outstanding matters from the previous year and any new priorities for the upcoming year. The work programme is reviewed as a standing item at every meeting.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

None

6.2 Legal

As set out in the report.

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

None

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

None

7 Appendices

None

8 Previous Consideration

Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee – 16 June 2026 – Minute No CWB4/26

Resources Scrutiny Committee – 23 June 2026 - Minute No TBC

Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee – 2 July 2026 – Minute No TBC

9 Background Papers

None

Contact Officer:	Ian Curran
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Ward Interest:	N/A
Report Track:	Council 21/07/2026, Resources 23/06/2026, Community Wellbeing 16/06/2026, Economic Planning and Development 02/07/2026
Key Decision:	N/A