

Leader of the Council and Finance Portfolio Statement 2018/19



INTRODUCTION

East Staffordshire Borough Council has three Corporate Priorities:

- **Value For Money Council Services:**
Protecting your money
- **Promoting Local Economic Growth:**
To benefit local people by turning aspiration into reality
- **Protecting and Strengthening Communities:**
Love where you live

The following statement sets out how the Leader of the Council (including the Finance portfolio) and officers within this portfolio area will contribute to achieving these priorities, as well highlighting key achievements from 2017/18

However the activities outlined in the statement are often cross-cutting themes with overlaps into other areas, and throughout the statement there may be examples of joint delivery with other Executive Members as well as managers from other sections.

Each of the statements made by the individual portfolio holders will then be collated to form the basis of East Staffordshire Borough Council's Corporate Plan for 2018/19.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2017/18

Over the past 12 months, the Council has been working hard to improve its services and is currently on track to achieve 100% of this portfolio's milestones set for 2017/18 by the end of this financial year.

Some of these achievements are highlighted in the following section.

Local Government Finance System

Central Government intend to introduce a new system of funding local authorities before the end of this Parliament. This includes the move towards 75% Business Rates Retention and a revision of the current needs-based allocation of funding. These changes could potentially have a significant impact on the future levels of financial resources available to provide services to residents of the Borough. The Council has been proactive in terms of responding to Government consultations and has worked in partnership with sector wide bodies in order to influence the design of the new system.

Continued to Improve our Financial Resilience

The Council has continued to ensure it has a firm and stable financial footing and that there are suitable and appropriate arrangements for ensuring value for money and financial resilience. This has been done by realising the savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and achieving unqualified auditor's opinions in relation to the accounts and Value for Money. Early closure of accounts will be embedded before the statutory requirements come into force and the Council has, once again, achieved having its Statement of Accounts audited and approved two months ahead of the statutory deadline, whilst implementing new accounting requirements.

The forthcoming withdrawal of the Revenue Support Grant and a greater reliance on income generation through fees and charges, Council Tax and Business Rates required the Council to respond to and prepare for these challenges. It has worked through the programme identified in the Corporate

Fees and Charges Policy, and continued to look at ways of maximising the Council Tax and Business Rates Tax Bases. It has carried out a review of Court costs for Council Tax and Business Rates and introduced Council Tax penalties. The Council has also built on its treasury management approach and considered alternative treasury investment opportunities, including property funds.

The Council has also continued to improve Member engagement and Member knowledge with the corporate finance function through a series of financial briefings.

Human Resources

The Council has continued to monitor staffing availability through ongoing and detailed analysis of short term sickness absence, to ensure staffing resource is optimised.

Payments Team

The Council has continued to support businesses by promptly paying its Creditors, paying within an average of 13 days from receipt of invoice date.

Accommodation Review

In January 2017 a member working group was formed in order to consider the Council's future corporate accommodation needs. The accommodation review sought to identify the most appropriate solution for meeting these needs and began the process of working towards the delivery of the identified option. This has led to the Council moving away from the Maltsters site, relocating its main offices to Burton Town Hall.

Improved Scrutiny and Audit Arrangements

In line with the Communities and Local Government Committee plans to open an inquiry into the effectiveness of local authority scrutiny arrangements, the Council carried out a review of its scrutiny committees and implemented a revised approach creating more efficient and effective overview, scrutiny and audit functions.

Appeals

To ensure that it continues to be robust in its decision making processes and in its work to defend legal challenges, the Council has monitored the proportion of appeals against the number of planning applications received. This has allowed the Council to establish a baseline figure in order to more effectively review performance in the future.

Democracy and Elections

The Council prepared for and carried out the County Council elections in May 2017. This is in addition to successfully delivering the General Election and four local by-elections at short notice. The Elections team has also successfully implemented a new election management software system, offering improved efficiency and functionality.

Further Exploitation of the Technical Architecture

The Council has continued to work in an efficient and safe environment by ensuring that there are ongoing improvements to its technology infrastructure. The Council has also continued to make substantial improvements to its operating capabilities, with upgrades within Council departments to maximise flexible working opportunities. The progressive approach to ICT strategy and management was recognised nationally as the Council was shortlisted in the “Transformation” category at the Local Government Chronicle Awards earlier in the year.

Channel Shifting to SMARTER Resident Interaction

The Council has continued to campaign and promote the website in order for it to become the preferred point of contact for resident enquiries. It has built on the previous year’s activity, once again focusing on the Council’s self-service facilities in high contact areas, such as Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Planning Services, in order to maximise take-up of these more efficient and cost-effective access channels. There was more national recognition as the Council was included in the Digital Leaders 100 Awards Program in the “Digital Council of the Year” category.

Continue to Make Improvements to the Procurement Process

The Council has continued to improve its procurement activities, in line with the current strategy, and introduced category management into its procedures. It has also implemented new procurement procedures for consumable items as well as looking at opportunities for savings in printing and postage.

Contributed to New Ways of Working

There has been a continuation of collaborative working across the Council, as it continued to appraise and investigate options for new methods of service delivery. This has included the progression of the procurement and project management support to the Leisure and Cultural Services review, and technical and professional support to the Accommodation review.

Legal and Assets

The Council has continued to benefit from legal advice and assistance across the whole of its operations – notably in the areas of planning appeals; corporate governance; major procurement projects/tender exercises; and corporate projects. Work is well underway to ensure compliance with the new General Data Protection Regulations in readiness for the 25th May 2018 implementation date; and that work is ongoing. The Council's assets portfolio has been maintained to a high standard thanks to the continuation of the rolling programme of annual condition surveys. Since May 2017 the Council's Monitoring Officer has dealt with 14 new Member conduct issues, six in relation to Parish Council Members with the remainder relating to Borough Council Members.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2018/19

The Council is determined to continue to build on its successes during 2017/18 as it moves forward into the 2018/19 financial year. It will continue to improve performance, service delivery and value for money through delivery of the Council's three Corporate Priorities. Achievement of these priorities will be supported by the Leader of the Council's portfolio (including the Finance portfolio) through delivery of the objectives detailed in the following section. The specific performance indicators identified to measure these objectives are referenced in the paragraphs below.

Continue to Improve our Financial Resilience (Targets L01; L02; L03; L04; L05; L06)

The Council will continue to ensure it has a healthy and robust financial footing and that there are suitable and appropriate arrangements for ensuring value for money and financial resilience. Savings that are identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) will be realised and the Council aims to again achieve unqualified auditor's opinions in relation to the accounts and Value for Money. The Council will also ensure it achieves the new statutory deadline for the earlier auditing and approval of the Statement of Accounts, in addition to ensuring it complies with numerous new technical accounting requirements.

The Council will continue to play a very proactive role when dealing with Government financial consultations, through thought out responses as well as ensuring the Council's views are communicated through regional and national networks. The Council will conduct an external budget consultation exercise, and will also continue to improve Member engagement and Member knowledge with the corporate finance function through a series of financial briefings.

Review Payment of Fees for the Independent Remuneration Panel (Target L07)

The Council is required to establish and maintain an allowances panel that must be convened to provide advice on Members' allowances before a Council

changes or amends its allowances scheme. All councils are required to “pay regard” to their panels’ recommendations before setting a new or amended Members’ Allowances scheme. The last review was carried out in 2014, so this will be reviewed again this year.

Improving Value for Money through Corporate Projects (Targets L08; L09)

Over the past 12 months the Council has been working hard to improve value for money, through managing the projects looking at alternative delivery solution for its Leisure and Cultural Services in addition to the corporate accommodation move back to the Town Hall. This support to these corporate projects will continue until their completion, in line with their individual programmes. Further support will also be provided on work in other portfolio areas, including the procurement of a consolidated building services contract to ensure it is purchasing goods, works and services in the most efficient manner, which is integral to the implementation of the in-house Disabled Facilities Grant service being led by colleagues in Regulatory Services.

Improvements to ICT (Target L10)

The Council will continue to provide a secure virtual working environment by reviewing its processes for keeping systems up to date and secure. It will ensure that security arrangements continue to meet the requirements of the Public Services Network (PSN), or any replacement standard, and the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCIDSS). This provides assurance that the Council continues to offer a safe and secure digital environment when delivering services to members of the public. A Member briefing will also be undertaken to raise awareness of the importance of having a secure virtual working environment.

Human Resources (Target L11, L12)

The Council will continue to monitor staffing availability through ongoing and detailed analysis of short term sickness absence, to ensure staffing resource is optimised. In addition the Council will this year be undertaking a review of its Single Equality Scheme.

Payments Team (Target L13)

The Council will continue to support businesses by promptly paying its Creditors following receipt of an invoice.

Legal and Assets (Targets L14; L15)

Early in the next year the Council will introduce the policies and procedures necessary to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations when those come into force on 25th May 2018. Work will continue to ensure that corporate projects receive the appropriate levels of legal support, with particular emphasis on the Leisure and Cultural Services project. The Council's assets portfolio will continue to be well-managed, and to that end a condition survey will be commissioned in respect of the Canal Street industrial units with the aim of identifying any repairs or improvement works which need to be carried out.

Elections (Targets L16; L17)

The Council is required to undertake a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations with a view to establishing their suitability. There is no requirement to change any of these districts, polling places and polling stations but any "no change" decision must be fully justified as part of the overall proposals. Ahead of the consultation exercise due for later in 2019, the Elections Team will review all polling districts, polling places and polling stations by March 2019.

Whilst democratic engagement rates across the Borough are generally very good the Council recognises that, with the emergence of new technology, more could be done to increase voter awareness across all demographics. This work will build on the new Elections Management System implemented in 2017 and align itself with the SMART / Digital approach elsewhere across the Authority.

SMARTER SERVICES - A Digitised Council (Targets L18; L19; L20)

This year the Council will continue to develop its SMART approach through a range of avenues, with the intention of continuing the shift towards digital service delivery. The Council will look to adopt a Digital Strategy that provides an overarching vision for how customers can use Council Services via digital

means. This new strategy will include the investigation into options for services that are not currently available through fully electronic means, and developing web-based self-service forms. This review of potential improvements to the self-service provision will include looking at the feasibility of the integration of an online payment system with the Council's web-based self-service forms, to improve its online services for its customers. Achievement of these and other milestones identified in the new strategy will be monitored throughout the year. Additionally, with an increasing focus on online services, the Council will undertake a refresh of its website to ensure that it continues to be modern, user-friendly and offers all relevant functionality.

MEASURES AND TARGETS FOR 2018/19

The Leader of the Council's portfolio (including the Finance portfolio) has identified a number of measures and targets for 2018/19 which will contribute to the delivery of the objectives detailed above. These are set out in the following tables.

Value for Money Council Services

Ref	Measures	Target 2018/19
L01	Set Budget for 2019/20	Set Budget for Council Approval (February 2019)
L02	Statement of Accounts	Submit Statement of Accounts by New Statutory Deadline (July 2018)
L03	Responding to Significant Local Government Finance Changes and Assessing the Impact on the Council's Financial Position	Activities Throughout the Year Reported in Line with the Timed Responses (March 2019)
L04	Improve Finance Awareness with Members	At Least 2 Briefings Delivered to Elected Members During the Year (March 2019)
L05	Continuing to Improve the Value for Money of Council Services	Achieve Savings Targets as Stated in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (March 2019)
L06	Continuing to Improve the Value for Money of Council Services	Conduct Budget Consultation (September 2018)

Ref	Measures	Target 2018/19
L07	Continuing to Improve the Value for Money of Council Services	Review Payment of Fees for the Independent Remuneration Panel (March 2019)
L08	Continuing to Improve the Value for Money of Council Services	90% Satisfaction with the Corporate Contribution to the Strategic Leisure Management Project (March 2019)
L09	Continuing to Improve the Value for Money of Council Services	90% Satisfaction with the Corporate Contribution to the Accommodation Move Project (March 2019)
L10	Providing a Secure Virtual Working Environment and Raising Awareness with Elected Members	Security Arrangements to Meet Requirements of PSN (or Replacement) / PCIDSS and Member Briefing Undertaken (March 2019)
L11	Increasing Staffing Availability Through Reduced Sickness	Short Term Sickness Days Average: <i>To be Agreed Post Outturn</i>
L12	Continuing to Meet Public Sector Equality Duties	Review of Single Equality Scheme Complete (July 2018)
L13	Improve On The Average Time To Pay Creditors	Average Time To Pay Creditors: <i>To be Agreed Post Outturn</i>
L14	Legal and Assets	Introduce the Policies and Procedures Necessary to Ensure Compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (May 2018)

Ref	Measures	Target 2018/19
L15	Legal and Assets	Condition Survey Commissioned in Respect of the Canal Street Industrial Units (October 2018)

Protecting and Strengthening Communities

Ref	Measures	Target 2018/19
L16	Increasing Opportunity for Democratic Engagement	Investigate Use of Digital Engagement Software for Electoral Registration (December 2018)
L17	Increasing Opportunity for Democratic Engagement	Prepare for Polling District Review (March 2019)
L18	Continue to Develop SMART/Digital Approach to Improve Public Access to Services	Adoption of Digital Strategy (October 2018)
L19	Continue to Develop SMART/Digital Approach to Improve Public Access to Services	80% of 2018/19 Milestones in New Digital Strategy Achieved (March 2019)
L20	Continue to Develop SMART/Digital Approach to Improve Public Access to Services	Corporate Website Refresh Complete (March 2019)