

Leader of the Council & Finance Leader's Statement 2019/20



INTRODUCTION

East Staffordshire Borough Council has three Corporate Priorities:

- **Value for Money Council**
- **Community Regeneration**
- **Environment and Health & Wellbeing**

The following statement sets out how the Leader of the Council and officers within this portfolio area will contribute to achieving these priorities, as well highlighting key achievements from 2018/19.

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 2019/20.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2018/19

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 2018/19 by the end of this financial year.

Some of these achievements are highlighted in the following section.

Continued to Improve our Financial Resilience

The Council has continued 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 identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) have been realised and the Council has again achieved unqualified auditor's opinions in relation to the accounts and Value for Money. The Council has also achieved the new statutory deadline for the earlier auditing and approval of the Statement of Accounts, in addition to complying with numerous new technical accounting requirements.

The Council has continued to engage with Government financial consultations, ensuring the Council's views have been communicated through regional and national networks. The Council conducted a budget consultation exercise, and continued to improve Member engagement and Member knowledge with the corporate finance function through a series of financial briefings.

Reviewed Payment of Fees for the Independent Remuneration Panel

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. This was reviewed this year.

Improved Value for Money through Corporate Projects

The Council completed the accommodation move back to the Town Hall and provided corporate support to projects including Leisure Services, Burton Town Centre Regeneration Programme and 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

Improvements to ICT

The Council has continued to provide a secure virtual working environment by reviewing its processes for keeping systems up to date and secure. It has ensured that security arrangements continue to meet the requirements of the Public Services Network (PSN) 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 was also provided to raise awareness of the importance of having a secure virtual working environment.

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. In addition the Council has completed a review of its Single Equality Scheme.

Payments Team

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

Legal and Assets

The Council has introduced the policies and procedures necessary to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations. Work has continued 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 has continued to be well-managed, and to that end a

condition survey was commissioned in respect of the Canal Street industrial units to identify any repairs or improvement works which need to be carried out.

Elections

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. The Elections Team has reviewed all polling districts, polling places and polling stations.

SMARTER SERVICES - A Digitised Council

This year the Council has continued to develop its SMART approach through a range of avenues, with the intention of continuing the shift towards digital service delivery. The Council has adopted a Digital Strategy that provides an overarching vision for how customers can use Council Services via digital means. This new strategy includes investigating options for services that are not currently available through fully electronic means, and developing web-based self-service forms and therefore improving its online services for its customers. Additionally, with an increasing focus on online services, the Council will have completed a refresh of its website to ensure that it continues to be modern, user-friendly and offers all relevant functionality.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2019/20

The Council is determined to continue to build on its successes during 2018/19 as it moves forward into the 2019/20 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)

The additional Council Tax raised in 2019/20 is the equivalent of £3.50 per household and will be utilised to protect council services against the reductions in Government funding that have been experienced and managed by the Council over the last few years. We will therefore continue to proactively improve financial management, ensuring that proper arrangements are in place to ensure value for money and effective financial resilience. The savings that are identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy will be realised and we will once again aim to achieve unqualified auditor's opinions relating to the Statement of Accounts and Value for Money.

We will once again carry on meeting the challenging new statutory deadlines for the preparation, auditing and approval of the Council's Statement of Accounts, ensuring that we also comply with new technical changes.

We will continue to play a proactive role responding to Government finance consultations, particularly around Business Rates Retention reforms, aligned to the full reset of the business rates baseline and the move to 75% business rates retention in 2020/2021 and the review of local authorities' 'relative needs and relative resources' which is fundamental to the Government's new funding distribution methodology. Whilst these are being considered we will be assessing the potential impact on the Council's finances.

These challenges are not insignificant and we will strengthen the Finance Team to ensure we have the right capacity, skill sets and resilience as we move into the new environment of no Revenue Support Grant and a greater reliance on Business Rates. The Council will commence preparations for the roll out of HMRC's "making tax digital" reforms in advance of the local authority rollout planned for the second half of 2020. This will require a fundamental review of our arrangements and potentially the need to invest in new software.

The Council will also continue to improve Member engagement and Member knowledge through a series of financial briefings.

Refreshing our Internal Audit arrangements (Target L05)

During the course of the year we will review our internal audit arrangements. This will include a procurement exercise to ensure that we continue to obtain value for money in relation to this key service, which forms an important element of our overall governance arrangements.

SMARTER, Safer Digitised Services (Targets L06; L07; L08; L09; L10; L11)

The Council will build on its Digital Strategy, and its newly refreshed website, and with a *design once use often approach* it will develop the interface between the Agresso Finance (cash-receipting) system and MS Dynamics so that this complex relationship with requests for service and payments can both be carried out at the same time. This will allow for transactions such as bulky waste requests to be processed and paid for, providing a seamless service for the resident and reducing unnecessary contacts within the Council. Once this has been developed it will be replicable in other areas such as licence applications.

Alongside the new audio equipment which the Council will procure for use in Member meetings, we will expand on our *record-keeping* of Council meetings by adding a full audio recording of each formal meeting along with the official minutes of each meeting, accessed from the Council's website.

The Council will ensure that security arrangements continue to meet the requirements of the Public Services Network (PSN), or any replacement standard, which provides assurance that the Council continues to offer a safe and secure digital environment when delivering services to members of the public. We will investigate and improve our security internally. We will also investigate options and introduce biometric recognition to replace passwords as a form of identification and access control.

Successful Elections (Target L12)

The Elections Team are currently preparing for and will successfully deliver the Local Council Elections which are to be held in May this year.

Being a Value for Money Council through Corporate Projects, initiatives and Procurement (Target L13)

Corporate support will be provided to manage strategic projects within other areas of the Council, which includes the delivery of Leisure Management Contract and the Town Centre Regeneration Programme as well providing assistance to any new and emerging corporate initiatives.

There will be the continuous drive for improvements with procurement and we will investigate how we can further consolidate the Council's contractors, whilst balancing the need for a healthy supply base and we will once again carry out a detailed spend analysis to see what opportunities there are for increased savings.

Human Resources (Target L14)

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

Payments Team (Target L15)

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

Legal and Assets (Targets L16; L17)

Work will continue to ensure that corporate projects receive the appropriate levels of legal support. The Council's assets portfolio will continue to be well-managed, by carrying out the works identified from the condition survey of the Canal Street industrial units, and commissioning a further condition survey for some of the Council's miscellaneous properties to identify any repairs or improvement works which need to be carried out.

MEASURES AND TARGETS FOR 2019/20

The Leader of the Council's portfolio (including the Finance portfolio) has identified a number of measures and targets for 2019/20 which will contribute to the delivery of the objectives detailed above. These are set out in the following table.

Value for Money Council

Ref	Measures	Target 2019/20
L01	Set the MTFS for 2020/21 onwards	Set Budget for Council Approval (February 2020)
L02	Savings targets for 2019/20	Achieve Savings Targets as Stated in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (March 2020)
L03	Having an approved Statement of Accounts	Submit Statement of Accounts by New Statutory Deadline (July 2019)
L04	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 2020)
L05	Internal Audit Service Procurement	Procurement concluded and new contract awarded (March 2020)
L06	Working towards the Government's new HMRC VAT Digitalisation Compliance requirements	Compliance Report completed (March 2020)

Ref	Measures	Target 2019/20
L07	Continuing to digitise SMARTER services	Secure Integrated Service Request and Payment mechanism developed and implemented (December 2019)
L08	Continuing to digitise SMARTER services	Audio recording of Council meetings added to Corporate Website (September 2019)
L09	Continuing to digitise SMARTER services	80% of 2019/20 Milestones in New Digital Strategy Achieved (March 2020)
L10	Providing a more secure ICT working environment	Security Arrangements to Meet Requirements of PSN (or Replacement) (March 2020)
L11	Providing a more secure ICT working environment	Preferred biometric approach to password replacement identified and commenced (December 2019)
L12	Successfully deliver local elections	Local elections delivered (May 2019)
L13	Carry out detailed Procurement / Contractor Consolidation / Spend Analysis	Report and way forward approved (December 2019)
L14	Increasing Staffing Availability Through Reduced Sickness	Short Term Sickness Days Average: <i>To be Agreed Post Outturn</i>

Ref	Measures	Target 2019/20
L15	Improve On The Average Time To Pay Creditors	Average Time To Pay Creditors: <i>To be Agreed Post Outturn</i>
L16	Legal and Assets	Carry out works to Canal Street industrial units, as identified in the condition survey (March 2020)
L17	Legal and Assets	Condition Survey commissioned for miscellaneous Council properties (October 2019)