

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 April 2024

Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 4, 2023/24



Cllr Alan White, Leader of Staffordshire County Council said:

“We continue to deliver on our priorities, including creating the right conditions for our economy to grow and supporting those in our communities who need our help the most.

“Local businesses continue to get the help they need to start up and grow and our ‘We are Staffordshire’ brand is successfully raising the profile of the county as a great place to live, work in and invest. Our work in tackling the effects of climate change is ongoing, including the highly successful Staffordshire Warmer Homes Scheme which is delivering energy improvements to hundreds of homes across the county.

“We still face challenges in both adult social care where demand is high and in children’s services with rising costs and ongoing placement pressures despite a further reduction in the number of children in care. Demand for Education, Health and Care plans for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities also remain high.

“Despite facing rising costs and inflationary pressures we continue to deliver a balanced budget and will invest to keep growing the county in a sustainable way, to make a positive difference in the lives of our residents. We continue to find new, better, and lower cost ways of delivering services and achieving results.”



Cllr Ian Parry, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources said:

“We continue to make significant progress across the organisation during the final quarter and departments are delivering on their priorities.

“Rising costs across the organisation and levels of demand and complexity of needs remain challenging, particularly in children’s and families services and in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities where transport costs are rising significantly.

“The latest revenue forecast outturn shows a forecast overspend of £4.0m (0.58%), compared to the Quarter 3 forecast overspend of £5.4m (0.9%). Like most local authorities, we still face financial challenges, but we are a well-run council and continue to live within our means, deliver value for money for taxpayers, whilst improving the services we deliver to our customers.”



Report Summary

This quarterly Integrated Performance Report provides an overview of Staffordshire County Council's progress, performance, and financial position in delivering against our Strategic Plan, Corporate Delivery Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Recommendation

We recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Notes and challenges performance and advises of any further information and/or action required.



Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet – Wednesday 17 April 2024

Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 4, 2023/24

Recommendation of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

We recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Notes and challenges performance and advises of any further information and/or action required.

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive & Director for Corporate Services and the Director of Finance

Reasons for Recommendations

This is an opportunity for Cabinet to consider and discuss Staffordshire County Council's quarterly performance and finance position.



Quarter 4 Summary

This report provides an update on Quarter 4 progress in relation to delivering the council's priorities and pledge as set out within the council's [Strategic Plan 2022-26](#).

Key highlights

- **Number of Children in Care:** Number has further reduced, reflecting significant work that has taken place to bring overall numbers down, while continuing to make sure the right children are in care.
- **Secondary School Place Allocation:** 91% of offers to parents were for a first- choice secondary school with almost 99% being offered one of their top three choices.
- **Awards:** Shortlisted for two awards at this year's Local Government Chronicle (LGC) awards - Staffordshire Virtual School in the 'Large Team of the Year' category and Staffordshire Warmer Homes scheme in the 'Environmental Services' category.
- **New Care Act Assessment Pathway:** Streamlined process well received by practitioners following introduction in November; further work taking place to assess impact on quality.
- **We are Staffordshire:** successful in securing Lichfield as a host location for the City Nation Place UK Conference in September 2024
- **New Community Learning Framework:** Progressing well with 1,223 enrolments in the first term, above the target of 1,000.
- **Schools Property Projects:** All 3 new primary schools remain on track to open in September 2024.

Key challenges

- **Children in Care (sufficiency and cost of care):** Continued pressures across Children's services, including the rising cost and complexity of Children in Care, and ongoing placement pressures. Continuing to prioritise Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) improvement plan.
- **SEND:** Increased demand for Education, Health and Care Plans continues to impact on timeliness. Enhanced Assess, Plan, Do, Review (EAPDR) approach being implemented which will help improve timeliness in the longer term.
- **DoLS Demand:** Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLS) requests remain high, however average waiting time reducing, and positive feedback received from family members and care providers.
- **Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance:** Preparations continue following publication of guidance.
- **Highways Performance:** Levels of demand continue to be high, particularly in relation to higher risk defects, mostly due to the wet weather. Support for operations has been prioritised and crews redeployed to respond to higher risk defects, helping improve the timeliness of repairs between January and February for the defects that pose the highest risk.

Further details of the above can be found in the main report and accompanying appendices.

Financial Overview

1. The latest revenue forecast outturn shows a forecast overspend of £4.0m (0.58%), compared to the Quarter 3 forecast overspend of £5.4m (0.9%). There continues to be areas of financial risk in Children and Families, with further details included within this report and appendices 2-7.

2. Encourage good health and wellbeing, resilience, and independence

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
GREEN	GREEN

3. In November 2023, a new Care Act assessment pathway was introduced in Staffordshire to streamline the process by reducing the number of assessment forms that need to be completed. This has been well received by practitioners and further work is underway to assess the impact on quality and to understand the experience of people who have been assessed. As a result of the change, the performance from November only includes people who require a more detailed assessment of their need. Overall demand for assessments remains largely consistent, however the proportion of people who receive their assessment within 28 days has reduced in January and February 2024 (71% in Feb 2024 compared to 87% in December 2023 - See Appendix 1), as it's the more complex cases that make it to this stage. This has been compounded by high demand in January but is expected to recover through March. The average number of days waiting for an assessment has reduced from 54-days in March 2023 to 30-days in January 2024. The council will monitor its performance closely over the coming months.

4. The number of monthly safeguarding contacts received in February 2024 was 1,263, which was largely consistent with the number received in February 2023, 1,269. Analysis indicates that there has been an increase in contacts which are lower in risk, with no indication there has been an increase in risk of abuse or neglect to adults within Staffordshire. Recognising the priority of safeguarding, the council has allocated additional temporary resource to the service and is reviewing its pathways to identify any further improvements that can be made.

5. The number of reviews of people receiving services for 12 months or more has remained high, with 89.9% reviewed in the previous 12 months to February 2024, exceeding the target of 80% (see Appendix 1). This is slightly less than the peak in performance observed in October 2023 of 92.2%. An audit of strengths-based practice (where the strengths of an individual are assessed at review and form the basis of the care plan)

was conducted in February 2024, which indicated that most reviews evidence the strengths and skills of the person, their family network, and access to community services.

6. Like other local authorities, the council continues to see high demand for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications where it is necessary to deprive a person of their liberty in a hospital or care home if they lack capacity to consent to their treatment and care. The council currently has 3,882 people with DoLS authorised, an increase of 20% since March 2023. Due to increased demand in January, the number of people waiting over 21 days has increased to 631, however requests are prioritised, and the service has continued to reduce both the number of people waiting and the average waiting time month on month. People have currently been waiting 30 days (down from 54 in March 2023). The council compares favourably to other local authorities on this metric based on latest data from 2023. Feedback from family members has indicated that the DoLS process has been explained to them well, that they were listened to and were satisfied with the service they received. Care providers were also generally positive, commenting on the professional manner and conduct of the council's assessors.
7. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is responsible for assessing how the council is performing against duties under the Care Act 2014. Following the completion of pilots with five councils in November 2023, the CQC published its guidance for local authority assessments in December 2023 and announced the first councils that will be inspected. The council is now reviewing its self-assessment and the required evidence for its own inspection which may happen any time between now and 2025.
8. The council continues to support its most vulnerable residents through the Staffordshire Warmer Homes Programme, which has been shortlisted for this year's Local Government Chronicle (LGC) awards in the Environmental Services category. Current figures show that 1,333 measures have been installed in 1,026 properties. The current Home Upgrade Grant Scheme 2 (HUGS2) brings eco-friendly heating solutions to rural residences (situated away from the gas network). In addition, the council has added local funding and is working with their Customer Journey provider to deliver a separate programme called 'Energy Company Obligation' (ECO4) and 'Great British Insulation Scheme' (GBIS). This approach allows some local flexibility to reach those individuals/properties that wouldn't be possible via the HUGS2 scheme alone. GBIS and ECO4 allow both off-gas and on-gas properties to be targeted, ensuring that both rural and urban fuel deprived homes are reached. This also means vulnerable on-gas owner/occupiers can be targeted.

9. Offer every Staffordshire child and young person the best start in life, and the chance to achieve their potential

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
AMBER	RED

10. The council continues to face challenges within Children's Services, including the rising cost and complexity of Children in Care. The council is continuing to prioritise its Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) improvement plan ready for submission in April 2024 in response to the Quarter 3 OFSTED inspection that found that the service 'required improvement to be good'.
11. Recruitment was completed in Quarter 4 for the Social Work Practice lead roles that were part of the Cabinet investment, with the posts now filled. This recruitment was linked to the career progression scheme project, which is now closed.
12. Progress continues to be made over Quarter 4 to reduce the number of children in care. As at the 29th February 2024, there were 1,335 children and young people in the authority's care in Staffordshire, which is a slight reduction compared to the previous quarter (1,351, in December 2023). This is a rate of 79.0 per 10,000; higher than the most recent national benchmark (70 per 10,000 - March 2022) but lower than regional (88 per 10,000 - March 2022). The number of children subject of a Child Protection Plan at the 29th February 2024 was 628, down from a peak of 717 in April 2023. This is a rate of 37.0 per 10,000 in Staffordshire, which is lower than the most recent benchmarks from March 2022 of 43.2 nationally and 44.8 regionally.
13. The number of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was 7,684 on 29th February 2024, compared to 7,066 a year earlier. This increasing demand means that the number of EHCP's issued in time (within 20 weeks) remains low in Staffordshire; 26.2% compared to the most recent national benchmark of 58% (2023). Work is underway to categorise the reasons for EHCP delays and mitigating actions are taking place. The council is implementing an Enhanced Assess, Plan, Do, Review (EAPDR) approach, which enables schools to assess what additional support the child or young person needs and refine this support through regular reviews. This will also help improve timeliness in the longer term.
14. Projected figures for Quarter 4 are expected to report that 1,400 families have achieved a successful and sustained outcome through the Building Resilient Families and Communities Programme since 1st April 2023, with final figures yet to be confirmed. The Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) increased this year's target number

of families by 62% to 1,290, which has been achieved, but performance is below the higher target set by the council of 1,660. Work is continuing with partners to identify families that demonstrate successful and sustained outcomes.

15. The Household Support Fund (HSF) supports families and others who need it most, to pay for food and energy bills. Since April 2023, over 27,000 children have benefited from Education Support Fund food vouchers, and over 19,000 households have benefitted from the professional's referrals scheme. Over 9,000 households have also benefited from financial budgeting support.

16. Nine out of 10 parents in Staffordshire were allocated their first-choice secondary school in Quarter 4. Of the 8,482 offers made for a Staffordshire secondary school at age 11, 90.8% were for a first-choice school. The national and regional average is around 83% based on the previous year's results. Nearly 99% have been allocated one of their top three preferred schools.

17. Staffordshire Virtual School has been shortlisted for the 'Large Team of the Year' category at this year's LGC awards. The Virtual School supports children and young people who are looked after by Staffordshire County Council, children who have left the authority and children who have a social work involvement. The Virtual School works with schools, social care partners, parents and carers to help improve education outcomes for children.

18. Support Staffordshire's economy to grow, generating more and better paid jobs

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
GREEN	GREEN

19. A key driver for further investment in Staffordshire is the council's Place Marketing campaign, with good progress made during Quarter 4 in promoting the 'We are Staffordshire' place brand. The programme has been successful in securing Lichfield as a host location for the City Nation Place UK Conference in September 2024. This is only the second host location outside London and is attracting 200+ senior place, regeneration, and Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO) leaders nationally. There was also a successful Ambassador Event held at Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG) new Skills and Innovation Centre in Stafford in January with over 100 attendees, and where the council's new skills prospectus 'A Place with the Right Skills' was launched. Work is also well underway on the 'We Are Staffordshire - A Place to Celebrate Conference' in April. This is actively being marketed, with 150 already registered to attend. A review is also underway to

consider how We are Staffordshire can support other brands such as tourism and investment to ensure continuity and a strong market presence by Staffordshire.

20. In March, approval was given to We are Staffordshire to launch a 'Staffordshire Film Office' in the county. The £300k investment will fund a three-year pilot which, when established, will seek to attract the benefits of increased profile, tourism, and wider economic development by bringing film and TV productions to Staffordshire.

21. Construction has commenced in Quarter 4 on the A38 Branston Interchange near Burton. This is following the £6m allocation to the scheme from the Government's Levelling Up Fund as a result of the council's bid in 2022 and a £4m contribution from the main developer of the Branston Locks site, Nurton Developments. Work is set to be completed in spring 2025.

22. The council has continued to support local businesses to start up and grow through its dynamic range of business support schemes. Between June 2020 and February 2024, the council has supported 653 businesses through the Staffordshire Start Up Programme. Of these, almost half (310) have started trading following the programme. Get Started and Grow has supported 243 business owners who have been trading up to 5 years with professional services support.

23. The New Community Learning Framework (2023 – 2027) is progressing well with 1,223 enrolments in the first term, which is above the target of 1,000.

24. Fix more roads, and improve transport and digital connections

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
AMBER	GREEN

25. Demand challenges continued in Quarter 4, particularly in relation to the volume of high risk 'Emergency', 'Category 1' and 'Category 2' highways defects identified. This was mostly due to the particularly wet winter. The number of identified high risk defects doubled in January and February 2024 compared with January and February 2023. This required redeployment of some crews from 'lower risk' planned repairs to higher risk defects which was enabled through the agility and flexibility of the council's delivery model. The redeployment, along with prioritising support for operations, helped improve the timeliness of repairs between January and February for Emergency and Category 1 defects. However, the high level of demand impacted on the timeliness of Category 2 (lower priority) repairs, with a reduction in the response time against the

benchmark in February 2024 (see Appendix 1). To mitigate against some of the demand challenges, additional resource has now been recruited to the inspection team and recruitment is also due to commence for additional roles to support the Highways Transformation Programme.

26. In addition to tackling the high level of demand for reactive repairs, the council has also continued to successfully deliver its Highway Investment Strategy, with the final 2023/24 capital maintenance schemes starting in Quarter 4. These include Ashbank Road (Werrington) and A34/A449 Queensway/Wolverhampton Road (Stafford).

27. In Quarter 4, there was a Local Transport Fund announcement that the council will be allocated almost £286m over seven years from 2025/26 for a range of local transport projects. The main aims of the fund are to drive better connectivity within towns, suburbs and cities; drive better connectivity between towns and cities; and improve everyday local journeys for people.

28. As part of Project Gigabit, which aims to provide gigabit-capable coverage to Staffordshire residents, Connect Fibre have begun work to supply fibre broadband to 5,400 premises (a £16.5m public sector investment) in the north-east of the county. Work has included contacting communities that will be affected to ensure early communications with impacted areas. Challenges remain around a relatively high number of premises in the county still under review for broadband intervention. These are being monitored by a Rolling Open Market review, which confirms where gigabit capable broadband infrastructure currently exists or is planned to be built and identifies eligible target areas for intervention. Plans to deliver to these premises are still on track to reach 85% coverage by 2025.

29. Tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
GREEN	GREEN

30. Staffordshire's Climate Change Action Fund offers assistance to local communities to build resilience to a changing climate and reduce Staffordshire's contributions to climate change. The deadline for Round 4 of the fund was extended to January 2024, with a total of 94 applications received over the two phases of the fund that ran between July 2023 and January 2024, totalling almost £66,000 of potential funding offered to community groups within Staffordshire. Funding for

LED lighting and energy efficiency measures formed around half of all successful applications.

31. In March 2024, the council started a new 'Net zero skills for growth' project with Keele University as part of the Innovate UK Pathfinder programme, which will run for 17 months. The approach will be to understand and map out the net zero (supply chain) opportunities up to 2050, and work with local businesses to understand the support they need to enable them to design that offer, as well as identify the skills required to support this growth. This will both help Staffordshire reach its net zero 2050 ambitions and help grow the local economy.

32. Carbon literacy training continues to be provided to start-ups and existing businesses in Staffordshire to increase awareness and help businesses understand their carbon footprint, with 106 individuals trained in 2023/24 (including 15 from Stoke-on-Trent).

33. How we work

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
GREEN	GREEN

34. To achieve the council's ambitions, we continue to challenge and change how we work.

35. The council is committed to working with its communities. In November '23, the council launched an engagement exercise, Our Staffordshire Communities, as the next step in the council's #DoingOurBit campaign. It aims to get residents involved with their communities, and to support the production of a new Staffordshire Communities Strategy. A resident survey ran alongside a wide range of other engagement activities, to help ensure the council reached as many people as possible. Staffordshire residents were asked about how they are helping others in their local area, what they would like to do and what stops them, and what ideas they had for the places where they live. The engagement closed on 29th February with 2,106 survey responses received and a vast range of feedback gathered as part of holding face to face community conversations. Detailed analysis of the engagement is now underway to provide a robust evidence base that will inform ongoing strategy development in the next quarter.

36. The council's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Capacity Building Framework continues to promote social action in local communities and build capacity in the voluntary and community sector. The contract is now in its second year which commenced in August 2023. Since August 2023, 213 organisations have been provided with

developmental support such as help with planning, developing policies and safeguarding. This figure includes 118 children and young people's VCSE organisations which received specific developmental support. The 213 organisations have also been supported to secure over £2.7m of additional funding.

37. Work to deliver the Staffordshire History Centre project is on track to open in Winter 2024. Despite recent adverse weather conditions, internal works to the Grade II* William Salt Library building are progressing well.

38. Digital continues to be fundamental to the way the council works as an organisation. Work continues across multiple priorities, such as exploring opportunities within the Health & Care and Children & Families services, for automation software to streamline operational processes and free up capacity for added-value work. Work is ongoing with Lichfield District Council to progress a collaborative "Single Front Door" approach across Staffordshire and a Disabled Facility Grant Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) pilot. A fourth pilot which focuses on a single Blue Badges process, working with Lichfield District Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, is also progressing well.

39. Work continues to deliver the council's refreshed internal People Strategy. A new careers website was launched in October to improve the candidate experience and support the council's recruitment process. Since its launch, to the end of February, there have been 17,279 views of the website by 9,133 unique visitors. As of 29th February, the average time to hire was at 43 days, which is an improvement on the benchmark of 45 days.

40. There is also a continued focus on workforce absence across the council to help teams improve their days lost due to sickness, evidenced by a consistent downward trajectory for the last twelve months. The People Operations Team are working directly with those services with the highest days lost to understand the root causes for absence, and proactively supporting them with short and medium-term actions. Across these services, 75% have improved their absence in the last quarter. Work has already been completed to identify the next services for support into Quarter 1. Additionally, absence related surgeries have continued to help manage absence.

41. As a result of this work, as of February 2024, long term absence stood at 7.86 days lost per employee, compared to 8.76 days at the same point in 2023 and similar to Quarter 3 where performance was 7.88 days. Short-term absence stood at 3.14 days lost per employee compared to 3.78 days at the same point in 2023. Over half of the workforce has had no sickness absences over the last year (52%, 2,349 people), with a further 24% (1,103 employees) having been absent for 5 days or fewer.

42. Live within our means and deliver value for money

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
AMBER	GREEN

43. Key priorities for 2023/24 continue to include carrying out the council's pledge of living within its means and delivering value for money, improving the customer experience, and inspiring a culture of innovation.

44. The council has successfully completed its work on refreshing its Medium Term Financial Strategy, with a balanced budget achieved for 2024/25. Full Council approved the budget at its meeting on 9th February.

45. During 2023/24, the council aims to raise £10.1 million net income through the sale of unused land and buildings to fund transformation of services and activity, in line with new Government regulation. By the end of February 2024, the council had delivered £7.91m.

46. Work on the council's schools and corporate projects is ongoing. All three new primary schools at Beaconfields (Stafford), Amington (Tamworth) and Dunstall Farm (Tamworth) remain on track to open in September 2024. In addition, Burntwood Health Centre, Douglas Road, Wombourne Library, Hawthorne House and Brackenberry projects are all proceeding as per the programme.

47. To help improve customer interactions, the council launched a new Contact Centre Telephony called Netcall in February 2024. The system will provide enhanced functionality and provide more options for the public in the way they interact with the council. In March 2024, the council also launched the public facing Business Benchmarking survey to over 2,000 residents to help achieve ServiceMark status by March 2025, which is a national standard, awarded by the Institute of Customer Services, recognising an organisation's commitment to customer service.

48. Inflation and rising demand for council services requires the council to find new, better, and lower cost ways of delivering services and achieving results. This requires creativity and innovation across the council, finding new ways of working, trialling technology, and applying best practice from other organisations. As a way of encouraging and celebrating innovation across the council, finalists have been announced for the Staffordshire Innovation Awards 2024, that will take place in April 2024.

49. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications of note in relation to this report, which is for information and discussion.

50. Resource and Value for Money Implications

Please see Finance Appendices, where resource and value for money implications are set out.

51. Climate Change Implications

The Corporate Delivery Plan monitors key activities that contribute to the Strategic Plan priority 'Tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable'. This report provides updates on these activities, but more specific climate change implications will sit within the details of individual projects and their associated plans.

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