

Staffordshire County Council

Statement of Priorities

2022 – 2027

FOREWORD

Staffordshire is a great place to live, work and invest where most people enjoy a good quality of life. There are over 400 schools and academies providing education for around 121,000 primary, middle, and secondary pupils. Every Staffordshire child deserves the best possible education and to leave school or college with the learning and skills they need to succeed in further education or the workplace. A strong economy relies on a high performing education system to produce the workforce of the future, and young people with the right skills, attitude, and ambition to meet the needs of our employers or to start a business of their own.

The number of schools in Staffordshire converting to academy status continues to increase. As of 01 July 2021, 70% (254) state funded schools in Staffordshire are now academies and this is expected to increase further. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the priority for Staffordshire schools is to continue to provide high quality teaching and learning so that our young people achieve the education and skills outcomes that we expect for a county with the ambition of Staffordshire.

The purpose of this Statement of Priorities (StOP) document is to describe how Staffordshire County Council (SCC) will use capital investment in schools and educational settings to support the achievement of both local and national priorities and to explain the nature of building improvement measures required in schools to plan capital expenditure. The StOP is



dynamic and recognises that planned proposals may have to be put on hold or re-phased if emergency works are required or if Central Government requires new proposals on strategy and funding. Priorities that are contained within the StOP reflect both the Asset Management Plan (AMP) and as far as possible whole school issues. In addition to this, the priorities recognise the need to consider the pressure to provide school places in terms of areas of pupil growth and decline.

The schools' capital programme is designed to support the County Council in meeting its vision to be:

"An innovative, ambitious and sustainable county, where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy."

This document will focus specifically on the priority **to improve education and skills provision in our schools so that more people can gain the training and qualifications they need to succeed** through our targeted investment in maintained schools.

The economic outfall from the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential impact that this might have on school place requirements will continue to be monitored and kept under review.

CONTEXT

Capital Funding

As in 2021/22, the allocation to the local authority consists of only two funding streams – Basic Need and School Condition Allocation (SCA). They are part of the Single Capital Pot allocation and can be used for all



local Children, Young People and Families priorities, not just in schools. Both streams can be used together.

School Condition Allocation (SCA) which replaced the former Capital Maintenance funding, is paid directly to the responsible body (SCC for maintained schools). SCA's consider the information collected through the national Property Data Survey programme (PDS) about the condition of schools and allocations are updated annually to reflect new or closing schools and where a school has moved to a new responsible body.

In 2021 the DfE introduced a new methodology to calculate SCA allocations. Combined with an increase in the basic rate per pupil per year and an overall increase in national funding, this significantly increased the SCA received by SCC in 2021/22. We await DfE confirmation of our 2022/23 allocation, therefore the School's Capital Programme is based on an **estimated SCA of £8m**. The programme will need to be reviewed once the funding allocation is announced to ensure affordability and that investment is targeted in SCC maintained schools (excluding Basic Need).

School Condition Allocation is for SCC Maintained schools and doesn't have to be used strictly for maintenance; it can also be used for improvement works. SCA for Academies, including those which have been approved but not yet converted, isn't included in the local authority's allocation.

Further targeted funding in the form of **the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA)** was announced on 25 March 2021 to support local authorities to deliver new places and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND, particularly those with



more complex needs, and for those pupils that require alternative provision, which we collectively refer to as 'high needs' provision.

HNPCA funding has been allocated to LAs proportionally, based on each local authority's estimated share of future growth in the high needs' pupil population. Whilst this funding is primarily to assist local authorities deliver new places needed for **September 2022**, it is for local authorities to determine how to best use the funding to meet local priorities. SCC's HNPCA allocation is **£2,441,300**.

The main points to consider: -

- Funding is primarily intended to assist delivery of new places by September 2022 but can be rolled forward if required.
- Predominantly intended for school aged children but LA's can choose to spend it across the 0 – 25 age range.
- Mainly intended to meet the additional capital needs associated with new places for young people with complex needs or have EHCP's.
- Can be spent on provision outside of Staffordshire.
- Intended to increase the number of places available for pupils and students with high needs and/or adapt and improve facilities to expand their use or make available to a higher range of needs.
- Additional places **MUST** be created at good or outstanding schools else DfE permission is required.
- Funding is for Capital purposes only not revenue.
- LA's must consult with local parents, carers, young people, and providers on strategy.

In the Budget announcement 27 October 2021, the Chancellor announced a £2.6 billion pot of funding to create additional places and to improve the suitability and accessibility of existing buildings to drive up standards in



special education. The funding is for the 3-year period 2022/23 – 2024/25 and we await confirmation of SCC's allocation.

In April 2021 SCC were notified that a bid to the **Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS)** delivered by Salix Finance for just over £3,000,000 had been successful and we were awarded the funding subject to the ability to procure and pay for the works by the end of September 2021. Works were carried out in over 20 schools to replace boilers, upgrade controls, replace pipework, insulate etc., and completed within the timescale. We will submit bids for further rounds of funding as and when they are announced.

Basic Need funding is the money given to local authorities each year to help them fulfil their duty to make sure there are enough school places for children in their local area. It is expected to meet the needs for growth in pupil numbers in relation to all state funded schools in the county, including any Academies, although other funding streams such as Devolved Formula Capital and VA Capital funding may also be used for this purpose. The DfE monitors local authorities' expenditure on Basic Need via the School Capacity Survey to ensure that it is being targeted at the areas with the greatest need. As commissioner of school places, the local authority has responsibility for determining priorities for basic need.

The projected number of additional places required by 2031 is circa 6,700 for mainstream primary and 2,900 for mainstream secondary education. Our Basic Need Allocation for 2022/23 is £0 but on 25 February 2021 the DfE announced a 2023/24 Basic Need allocation for Staffordshire of £2,010,674, further illustrating the importance of S106 agreements/funding.



School Premises Regulations

The Education Act 1996 places a duty on the Secretary of State to prescribe standards for the premises of all maintained schools in England and Wales. Those for England are set out in The School Premises (England) Regulations 2012 (SPRs) and they apply to all existing and new schools maintained by a local authority.

Similarly, the Education Act 2002 empowers the Secretary of State to prescribe standards for the premises of independent schools, which include Academies (including alternative provision Academies) and Free Schools. These are set out in Part 5 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 (ISS). The Act puts a duty on schools to exercise their functions with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

There are fewer regulations than previously, and they are less prescriptive, allowing schools more flexibility in how they use their premises. Many regulations state that provision must be 'suitable'. This is not precisely defined, but schools must consider the age, number and sex of pupils and any special requirements they have, when determining whether provision is suitable.

Any requirement that anything provided under these Regulations must be "suitable" means that it must be suitable for the pupils in respect of whom it is provided, having regard to their ages, numbers and sex and any special requirements they may have. A pupil has "special requirements" if the pupil has any needs arising from physical, medical, sensory, learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties which require provision which is additional to or different from that generally required by children of the same age in schools other than special schools.



Strategic Priorities

In the current economic climate, where there is a considerable degree of uncertainty around the provision of capital funding to support schools and education, it is imperative that the County Council has a pre-determined set of priorities already in place so that it has the flexibility and responsiveness it will need to act on those capital funding streams as soon as they become available.

There will continue to be more demand for capital investment than there will be resources available to meet that demand. In turn this will mean that choices, sometimes very difficult choices, will have to be made. The County Council is committed to ensuring that the process of determining priorities for capital investment is open and transparent. Key features of this approach include:

- consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities, the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) and the County Commissioner for Access to Learning to determine local priorities.
- published criteria for the assessment of priorities in the Asset Management Plan, and open access to the information held within it on all schools (Planned Maintenance Programme).
- consultation with all relevant partners, including schools and the three Dioceses, both directly and through the Local Management of Schools Consultative Committee (LMSCC).
- consultation with the Assistant Director for Education Strategy and Improvement.



In accordance with these principles and approaches, the following strategic priorities have been identified for capital investment in schools:

- securing enough school places, both the provision of new places where numbers are increasing, and the removal of surplus places, so that resources available to schools are used most efficiently.
- improving educational standards by addressing highest priority condition issues ensuring schools are safe, warm, and dry through the Planned Maintenance Programme.
- meeting climate change and sustainability targets (carbon net zero by 2050) through programmes to replace inefficient heating systems; upgrade old pipework; install new energy controls; upgrade/improve insulation and installing new LED lighting.
- delivering projects that make a difference to the school environment that are not condition driven but will have a significant impact through the Priority Capital Projects Portfolio.
- refurbishment of toilet facilities that are designed and fitted out to a standard that discourages anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- replacement/removal of aged and inefficient temporary buildings past their useful lifespan.
- ensuring that Staffordshire's Pathway schools are fit for purpose to allow children with mobility problems access to mainstream education.
- develop 'in-county' provision for children and young people with



Special Educational Needs, Disability (SEND) and vulnerable groups providing them access to the right support at the right time in the right way so that they can access high quality learning and skills opportunities so that they can realise their aspirations and lead a fulfilling and independent life.

Securing Sufficient School Places (Basic Need)

The County Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are enough school places in the area, promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity, and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. Staffordshire's highest priority for investment in schools is the provision of new places to meet basic need. The process of school place planning is complex in terms of the housing market in each area of the county; receipt of capital funding from government and developers; the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) at some Local Planning Authorities; changes in parental preference and individual school performance; births and inward and outward migration; new government legislation and policy; building costs; the increasing number of autonomous academies. All these factors combine to create a volatile environment.

Consideration of projected numbers from population trends and planned housing development within the county clearly demonstrates where there is a need to expand provision to meet growth. Projected investment required in new basic need projects by 2031 is estimated circa £207m. Based on the way we currently pay for schools to be built or extended, the 5-year programme is funded but there is a forecast shortfall of funding in the long term. To meet this gap, communities will look to us to work creatively and ensure that new school buildings are value for money.



Officers are continually monitoring numbers, securing S106 funding and updating the basic need requirements for each area as more information becomes available.

Planned Maintenance Programme

Condition surveys of schools are conducted on a 3-year rolling programme to assess the condition of the buildings (suitability and sufficiency information hasn't been collected for several years). This information is held in a database which identifies the most urgent categories of need. Every school has been provided with an Asset Management Plan (AMP) on which local decisions on capital projects can be made. The condition grades are: -

- A. Good – performing as intended with day-to-day servicing needs only**
- B. Satisfactory – performing as intended but with minor deterioration**
- C. Poor – not performing as intended or with major defects**
- D. Bad – Life expired and/or at serious risk of imminent failure**

The latest AMP condition survey information identifies work totalling £26.5m in the 3 highest priority categories (excluding Academies and Voluntary Aided schools), with work to the value of circa £2.7m identified under priority 1. Previous programmes of maintenance work have focussed on the priorities identified in the AMP, and these have been successful in addressing a significant amount of condition backlog issues. These figures don't consider the works completed in 2021/22.



The Planned Maintenance approach enables a co-ordinated programme of repairs and allows resources to be targeted where they are most needed to reduce the effects of unsatisfactory premises on pupils' education.

As part of the due diligence process Academy sponsors will wish to ensure that the buildings are in a good state of repair. The Maintenance Programme forms the basis for ensuring that building can be transferred in a safe and satisfactory condition.

Climate Change/Sustainability

Tackling climate change is one of the key principles underpinning everything we're committed to do in our Strategic plan. The Climate Change Act was passed in 2008 and established a framework to develop an economically credible emissions reduction path. In 2019, the UK became the first major economy to pass a law requiring the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050. This means that the country needs to remove as much carbon from the atmosphere as it emits. As a council, SCC declared a climate change emergency in July 2019 and are determined to reach carbon net zero by 2050 across every aspect of our service provision and estate. [Failure to comply with the legislation carries](#) significant financial penalties. The County Council is committed to helping save energy and reduce carbon emissions and energy saving features are incorporated into building projects wherever possible. Our carbon baseline is around 37,000 tonnes (tCO²e). This figure would have been significantly higher if not for innovative solutions we've already put in place to reduce our impact on the environment. Around half of Staffordshire's CO² emissions are due to buildings and some 80% of the property assets are schools. The challenge is now to remove the remaining 37,000 tonnes of carbon emissions and the school



estate has a vital role to play in meeting increasing CO² reduction targets. It's expected that schools will make a financial contribution to any projects carried out to achieve this.

Since January 2021, wholesale gas prices have risen 250 per cent across the world which has also driven up the cost of electricity. Schools face an added problem because of guidance from the DfE to "keep windows and doors open as much as possible due to air circulation to prevent Covid19". As the biggest revenue costs after staffing, we need to reduce costs to limit the burden on school resources.

It is essential that capital funding is made available for programmes to replace inefficient heating systems; upgrade old pipework; install new energy controls that monitor usage; upgrade/improve insulation and installing new LED lighting. Prioritisation methodology targets schools where modernising plant or equipment provides best value returns on investment. In addition to direct financial savings, the investment provides a better learning environment for staff and students through improved heating & lighting.

A Display Energy Certificate (DEC) is required for all schools with a total floor area of over 250m². DEC's are intended to raise public awareness of energy use and inform visitors to public buildings about the energy use of a building. DEC's provide an energy efficiency rating of the building from A to G, where A is the most efficient and G is the least efficient and are based on the actual amount of metered energy used by the building over the last 12 months. The operational rating is a numerical indicator of the actual annual carbon dioxide emissions from the building. A carbon neutral building with zero CO₂ emissions would have an operational rating of 0, and a building that resulted in twice the typical CO₂ emissions would



have an operational rating of 200. The benchmark operational rating for a typical school building would be rated at a "D" 100.

It is important to note that in addition to the targeted sustainability projects, many of our other investments improve our carbon footprint with the schools becoming more energy efficient.

Priority Capital Projects Portfolio

Staffordshire recognises the importance that the school environment has in educational attainment and that capital investment is essential to support projects that are not driven by condition. The impact of re-modelling or refurbishing areas to provide more suitable facilities is significant. Research carried out by the University of Salford ('Clever Classrooms') revealed that the environmental factors of a classroom can have significant impact upon the learning and academic progress of students. The report revealed that progress could be improved by as much as 16 per cent in just one year with considered implementation of positive air quality, décor, and natural light.

The Priority Capital Projects Portfolio encourages schools to use some of their Devolved Formula Capital (DFC), variable dependant on the size of the project/school circumstances to contribute to the works enabling SCC funding to stretch further.

The Development Officers work with schools to identify priority projects in their areas and liaise with the schools about making financial contributions to potential projects. All projects are assessed, weighted, and ranked so that a 'cut-off' point can be established as to which projects the capital funding available can support. If savings are achieved, then the next



project on the list is added to the portfolio. Care is taken to spread SCC funding as evenly across the county as possible whilst still addressing the highest priorities.

Refurbishment of Toilets

Historically, the design of school toilets has generally not been good for a complex set of reasons. Typically, children are reluctant to use them; when they are used, they are often the centre of behaviour and discipline problems. Prominent amongst the consequences are health problems and dehydration problems. Dehydrated children work less well. Ill children stay away; bullied children carry the pain for life.

There is considerable evidence highlighting the current issues with school toilets and the effects these have on pupils. An effective layout, high quality fittings and finishes, efficient cleaning, and maintenance, together with good access policies, are all essential to ensure that school facilities are valued. Overcoming common problems – such as the negative effects on short and long-term health caused by pupils avoiding drinking enough water or visiting the toilet – can have a positive influence on pupils' welfare, willingness, and ability to learn, their behaviour, morale, and attendance levels.

For a number of years SCC have invested in programmes to address the worst identified areas but a considerable number of schools where toilet refurbishment is a priority have been identified and we will endeavour to complete as many projects as possible from the list in accordance with the funding allocation.



Replacement/Removal of Temporary Buildings

Analysis of the AMP database indicates that there remains an amount of temporary/mobile accommodation in use across the county. Temporary accommodation is normally placed on a school to fulfil an urgent need and often to cater for increases in pupil numbers.

Many of these buildings are reaching the end of their useful lifespan; inaccessible to some students, parents, and staff; and with outdated heating, lighting, and technology they're inefficient and expensive to run. It is recognised that investment in a programme of replacement/removal of temporary/mobile buildings is important, not only in raising educational standards but also to reducing the carbon footprint (given their poor thermal performance).

Projects where condition dictates that repairs are no longer a real option are considered for inclusion in the capital programme. Where the accommodation is still required, temporary classroom units will be replaced with new buildings which will be more energy efficient and provide an enhanced environment for teaching and learning. The use of modular buildings or off-site construction will be evaluated for cost effectiveness before permanent buildings are considered.

Special Educational Needs

Staffordshire SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Strategy 2021 – 2026 sets out the vision and priorities for children and young people with SEND.



The vision is that *“all children and young people with SEND are given the opportunity to achieve everything that they can. They engage with the right support at the right time from their parents/carers, the community and the professionals that work with them to make this happen”*.

The strategy outlines four priorities to help to achieve the vision and enable improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families, these are: -

- We communicate well with each other.
- We work in partnership to meet the needs of children and young people.
- We ensure that the right support is available at the right time.
- We encourage communities to be inclusive.

SCC promote inclusion of children and young people with SEND within education settings with the aim that children and young people are given the opportunity to be educated in their local mainstream education setting whenever it can meet their needs, accessing education close to home to help develop and maintain friendships and links within the local community. There is a commitment to early intervention to meet needs as early as possible. This is supported by the graduated response and the SEND and Inclusion District Model which enables a locally based partnership approach to meeting the needs of pupils with SEND.

Accessibility

SCC believe that all children and young people, irrespective of background or needs, are entitled to a good education that enables them to fulfil their potential. Improving access to education, participation in the school curriculum and educational achievement for pupils with disabilities is vital



to ensure equality of opportunity, to support pupils to reach their educational potential and improve their future outcomes (draft Accessibility Strategy 2021).

The Draft Accessibility Strategy 2021 outlines how SCC will support those schools it is responsible for to: -

- Increase access to the curriculum for children and young people with disabilities.
- Improve the physical environment to increase access for children and young people with disabilities.
- Make information more accessible to children and young people with disabilities.

All schools have a statutory requirement to have an Accessibility Plan as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. The School Accessibility Plan should be based on the same principles as the local authority Accessibility Strategy and outline how the school will improve access to education for children and young people with disabilities over time. There should be a link between the school's SEN Information Report and their Accessibility Plan.

Mainstream Accessible Schools Network

Across Staffordshire there are a range of schools that have been categorised in accordance with their accessibility status. This accessibility status is based on the physical environment and access within the school. The categories have been developed to raise awareness of accessible facilities available within education settings in their local area in order to meet the needs of children and young people. Schools are described as



'accessible' if they meet basic requirements such as level access, disabled toilet facilities, provision of ramps and chair lifts at internal level changes.

Recently built schools have been designed to be compliant with equalities legislation in force at the time, but this does not mean that they meet current legislative standards. Schools are described as 'accessible' if they meet basic requirements such as level access, disabled toilet facilities, provision of ramps and chair lifts at internal level changes. Compliance of door widths and rate of incline of ramps has not been checked for the purposes of this document; some schools may fail a full, current accessibility inspection if rigorously tested. Being described as 'accessible' is not a guarantee that the school meets the full requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which depends on the needs of each individual child.

In making decisions about the accessibility of a school it is acknowledged that the impact of a disability on a child or young person will be different. Under the requirement to make 'reasonable adjustments', set out in the Equality Act 2010, there is an expectation that all schools will do what they can within the scope of their facilities and resources to accept children and young people with a physical disability with some management.

A list of Staffordshire's Network of Accessible Schools is attached at Appendix 1.

Education Provision

There are 23 maintained and academy Special Schools (5 of the special schools have residential education provision and some have listed building



status) and 6 maintained and academy Pupil Referral Units (PRU) and AP within Staffordshire with approximately 2,500 pupils in attendance.

In addition, there are 3 Autism Outreach Centres based at 3 mainstream High Schools and a Speech Language Centre based at a mainstream Primary school. SCC also developed short stay resource bases within mainstream settings to support pupils who do not have an EHCP as a preventative initiative.

At the end of December 2021, there are 6,400 pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs).

SEND Capital Investment Plans for 2022-23

SCC was allocated £2.4m High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA) in 2021/22. The aim of the funding is to deliver new school places and improve existing provision in education settings for pupils with SEND, particularly those with more complex needs and an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The funding can also be used to support SEND pupils and pupils that require Alternative Provision without an EHCP.

Following consultation SCC will use the HNPCA to deliver projects which involve: -

- The development of resource bases at mainstream schools for children with EHCP's and SEN support with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and/or Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC).
- Partnership working and co-location of specialist provision on mainstream sites.



- Increasing capacity in specialist provision to reduce the need to access placements at independent schools/out of county provision.

Schools were invited to apply for the funding and applications are currently being evaluated.

In October 2021 the government announced additional funding for the 3-year period 2022/23 – 2024/25 to create 30,000 “high-quality” school places for children with SEND and improvements to the accessibility of existing buildings. We await confirmation of SCC’s allocation.

Revised January 2022



Key to Appendices Classification

Category	Detail
Fully accessible	<p>GREEN - Fully wheelchair-accessible - all (or at least 90% of) teaching areas are accessible to wheelchair users, there are lifts to upper floors where applicable, and disabled toilets are provided in all main buildings. In practice a GREEN school would not have to rearrange the timetable to cater for a child following the mainstream curriculum who uses a wheelchair.</p>
Partially accessible	<p>AMBER - Partially wheelchair-accessible - a wheelchair user could follow a mainstream curriculum at the school, but a significant proportion of the site is upstairs and not accessible via a lift OR some main buildings do not have a disabled toilet OR one or more of the main entrances to your school has stepped access. In practice an AMBER school would have to undertake some rearrangement of the timetable to allow a wheelchair-user to receive a mainstream education AND/OR the child would have to take some circuitous routes around the site to reach teaching and recreational areas.</p>
Not accessible	<p>RED - Not wheelchair-accessible - it would be impossible or very difficult for a wheelchair-user to learn alongside her/his disabled peers at the school, because, for example, all or most of the main buildings that have upper floors do not also have lifts OR there are an insufficient number of disabled toilets on site OR most of the main buildings and areas of the site are not accessible via level access or a ramp. In practice a RED school would have difficulty timetabling teaching to allow several wheelchair-users to receive a mainstream education.</p>

Appendix 1 – Staffordshire’s Network of Accessible Schools

