

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 21 February 2024

Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 3, 2023/24



Cllr Alan White, Leader of Staffordshire County Council said,

“Creating the right conditions for businesses and our economy to thrive, whilst supporting the most vulnerable in our communities, remain priorities for the county council.

“We continue to support local businesses to start up and grow. Our ‘We are Staffordshire’ brand continues to raise the profile of the county as a great place in which to live, visit and invest. The ‘We are Staffordshire’ partnership was nominated for two categories at the Comms2point0 awards, and will be showcased at the UK’s Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (UKREiF) 2024 in Leeds.

“Our work to tackle the effects of climate change continues, with a 12% reduction in the authority’s carbon emissions since 2020/21, and a 50% reduction since 2018/19. Since December 2022, the Staffordshire Warmer Homes Scheme has installed 513 improvements in 349 properties to make them more energy efficient. We have also appointed partners to bring eco-friendly heating solutions to rural properties situated away from the gas network.

“Through our Winter Warmth Project and the Household Support Fund, 2,748 eligible residents have received their first payment of £300 towards help with their energy bills. We still face challenges in both adult social care and children’s services, although we continue to make good progress on timely social care assessments and have seen a slight drop in the number of children in our care. An OFSTED Inspection of Children’s Services resulted in ‘Requires Improvement to be Good’ and we are developing a plan to improve this rating.

“In addition to investment in digital infrastructure and highways, other major projects underway include the Staffordshire History Centre and three new primary schools, which remain on track to be completed and open by Autumn 2024.

“Despite the inflationary pressures facing councils like ours, we continue to deliver on 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 Quarter 3 and departments are delivering on their priorities.

"Rising costs across the organisation, along with recruitment and retention pressures continue. Levels of demand and complexity of needs also remain challenging, particularly in children's and families services and in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities where transport costs are rising very significantly.

"The latest revenue forecast outturn shows a forecast overspend of £5.4m (0.9%), compared to the Quarter 2 forecast overspend of £7.7m (1.1%). 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 customer experience. This approach, along with well managed finances, means we can continue to invest in our future, grow our economy and improve people's lives."



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

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Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 3, 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 3 Summary

This report provides an update on Quarter 3 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 reduced, reflecting significant work that has taken place to bring overall numbers down, while continuing to make sure the right children are in care.
- **We are Staffordshire:** Staffordshire's place brand highlighted nationally by nomination for two awards with Comms2point0. Attendance at UK's Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) 2024 launched online.
- **Care Act Assessment timeliness and Reviews:** Good performance continues.
- **Staffordshire Warmer Homes Scheme:** Since December 2022, 513 measures have been installed in 349 properties. Providers have now been appointed to bring eco-friendly heating solutions to rural properties that are situated away from the gas network.
- **Household Support Fund:** Through the Winter Warmth Project, 2,748 eligible residents have received their first payment of £300 towards help with their energy bills.
- **Climate Change:** Annual report highlights a 12% reduction in the authority's carbon emissions since 2020/21, and a 50% reduction since 2018/19.
- **Schools & Corporate Property Projects:** Stafford History Centre is progressing well. All 3 new primary schools remain on track to open in September 2024.
- **Digital Infrastructure:** Connect Fibre awarded contract to supply fibre broadband to 5,400 properties (£16.5m public sector investment).

Key challenges

- **OFSTED:** Inspection of Children's Services took place with an outcome of 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. An OFSTED improvement plan will be submitted in April 2024.
- **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. Recruitment of additional workforce continues.
- **SEND:** Increased demand for Education, Health and Care Plans continues to impact on timeliness. All additional Senior Key Workers are now in post.
- **DoLs Demand:** Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLs) requests remain high. Processes are under review to mitigate against delays in commencement of assessments.
- **Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance:** Preparations continue following publication of guidance.
- **Highways Performance:** Levels of demand were high, particularly in relation to higher risk defects, mostly due to the weather. However, the timeliness of repairs has been maintained, alongside delivery of the Highways Maintenance and Transformation Programmes. Additional resource has been recruited to help tackle the level of demand.

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 £5.4m (0.9%), compared to the Quarter 2 forecast overspend of £7.7m (1.1%). 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 Quarter 3, demand for Care Act Assessments for new clients was 36.6% higher than last year, with 4,337 assessments initiated between October and December 2023, compared to 3,175 between October and December 2022. However, positively the council continues to exceed its target for completed Care Act Assessments within 28 days (see Appendix 1). There has been a substantial rise in new assessments and a slow increase in unplanned re-assessments over the last 12 months, but demand appears to be stabilising, e.g. someone's needs have escalated, and they may require different support.

4. The number of monthly safeguarding contacts reduced from 1,429 in September 2023 to 1,214 in December 2023, but remained higher than December 2022 (1,117). Analysis indicates that there has been an increase in contacts which are lower in risk; it is not apparent that 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 continued to remain high, with 90.2% reviewed in the previous 12 months to December 2023, exceeding the target of 80% (see Appendix 1), which is slightly less than the peak in performance observed in October 2023, of 92.2%.

6. 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 3,904 people with DoLS authorised, an increase of 21% since March 2023. In the three months to December 2023, an average of 670 referrals per month were received, higher than the preceding 3 months (620 per month). The number of DoLS applications pending at the end of January 2024 was

1,060. Of these, 109 had a DoLS authorisation from their managing body, and 352 were within the statutory 21 day timescale for approval by the supervisory body. 599 exceeded the 21 day timescale of which 91 were requests from hospitals and 46 were high priority. The council is reviewing processes to ensure that requests from hospitals are updated to reflect that people have been discharged and DoLS is no longer required. Additional capacity has been appointed to reduce the number of DoLS requests pending, focusing on those exceeding the 21 day timescale. The long term trend for the number of DoLS requests pending is downwards and the council compared favourably to similar local authorities on this metric.

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 three 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 Warmer Homes Programme. Final figures from the Sustainable Warmth Competition show that since December 2022, there were 513 measures installed within 349 properties. This brings the total number of measures installed through Staffordshire Warmer Homes to 1,329 within 1,021 properties. The council has appointed providers to commence with Phase 2 of the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2), bringing eco-friendly heating solutions to rural residences (situated away from the gas network). Properties have started to be processed however no installations have yet taken place.
9. A new Older People Strategy 2024-29 was approved at Cabinet in December, which sets out how the council will support the growing aging population in Staffordshire. The strategy is designed to help people live independently at home, to ensure good quality services are available for those who do need care, to support those needing care to live independently for as long as possible, and to ensure that if someone can no longer stay at home, the right support is available.
10. During Quarter 3, thousands of residents benefited from help, advice, and guidance from the county council's dedicated cost-of-living campaign. The 'Here to Help' website offers information on eligibility for benefits, help with energy bills, business support, wellness, food, essentials and accessing help in the community. Over 21,000 people have visited the website since its launch in 2022 with a total of more than 71,000 page views. Front line services have also provided significant support to residents managing cost-of-living pressures and have saved families an estimated £60,000 since 2020 with pre-loved school uniform.

11. 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

12. The council continues to face challenges within Children’s Services, including the rising cost and complexity of Children in Care, and is prioritising improvements in Children’s Services after an Ofsted inspection found that the service ‘required improvement to be good’. Following the inspection Ofsted praised provision for the children and young people in care, but also raised areas for improvement. The council is committing to a series of actions, including stronger targets with more structured monitoring, a clearer escalation process when it is felt progress on issues isn’t fast enough, closer cooperation with health and housing providers, more sampling of work, and better provision of broadband access for care leavers to support their first independent steps.

13. Recruitment of additional capacity in the children’s workforce continued in Quarter 3, with further external Social Worker appointments to be made in Quarter 4 for Social Work Practice Leads and Senior Social Worker roles that have not been filled internally. As part of the children and family’s social worker progression scheme project, 30 Social Work Practice Leads have been recruited, with 15 of these posts funded by the Cabinet investment that was approved in December 2022.

14. Progress has been made over Quarter 3 to reduce the number of children in care. As at the 31st, December 2023, there were 1,353 children and young people in the authority’s care in Staffordshire, which is a slight reduction compared to the previous quarter (1,364, as at September 2023). This is a rate of 80.1 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 31st, December 2023 was 622, down from a peak of 717, and the lowest number since a low of 606 in March 2022. This is a rate of 36.8 per 10,000 in Staffordshire, which is lower than the most recent benchmarks from March 2022 of 43.2 nationally and 44.8 regionally.

15. The number of children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was 7,325 at 31st December 2023 compared to 6,985 a year earlier. This increasing demand means that the number of EHCP’s issued in time (within 20 weeks) remains low in Staffordshire; 28% compared to the most recent national benchmark of 58% (2023). Recruitment is ongoing for Educational Psychologists whose

appointments will assist in improving timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans, and support early intervention. Work is underway to categorise the reasons for EHCP delays and mitigating actions are taking place. The council is also 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 impact on timeliness in the longer term.

16. Final figures for Quarter 3 have confirmed that 1,030 families have achieved a successful and sustained outcome through the Building Resilient Families and Communities Programme since 1st April 2023. The Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) have increased this year's target number of families by 62% to 1,290, and at the end of Quarter 3, 80% of this annual target had been achieved. As the council strives to achieve more for families in Staffordshire, it was hoping to achieve outcomes for 1,677 families (30% above DLUHC target), and at the end of Quarter 3, 61% of this more challenging target had been achieved. Work is underway with partners during Quarter 4 to identify families that demonstrate successful and sustained outcomes to further improve this performance.

17. The Household Support Fund (HSF) supports families and others who need it most, to pay for food and energy bills. Over 9,300 households benefited through phase 1 of the professionals' referral scheme between April and September 2023, and a further 6,800+ through phase 2 since October 2023. Over 700 care leavers also received the first of four £50 voucher payments at the end of August and in December. Through the Winter Warmth Project, 2,748 eligible residents have received their first payment of £300 towards help with their energy bills.

18. Support was made available to Staffordshire's most vulnerable families through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, which continues to offer children and young people free activities and a healthy meal, over school holidays. Of 50,335 places available across the county 37,454 (75%) were taken. On average an eligible child attended 10 of the maximum-allowed 16 sessions over the summer, compared to 7 nationally. The offer is increased with new provision such as indoor climbing, paddleboard lessons, and specialist sessions offering wellbeing and confidence building.

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

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
GREEN	GREEN

20. A key driver for further investment in Staffordshire is the council's Place Marketing campaign, with good progress made during Quarter 3 in promoting the 'We are Staffordshire' place brand, which has been shortlisted for two awards with Comms2point0, a learning and sharing space – Best Collaboration and Best Small Team. A huge achievement from over 450 entries. There was also a successful Ambassador Event held at Stafford Gatehouse in October with over 80 attendees. Staffordshire's attendance at the UK's Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) 2024 to market Staffordshire nationally was launched online, sharing the video on social media, and reaching out to previous sponsors. Work is also taking place to relaunch the school engagement work for Staffordshire Day 2024, which is being led by a young person's delivery group engaging with local artists in schools to showcase what Staffordshire means to them.

21. Development at the Chatterley Valley West employment site near Newcastle-under-Lyme re-started in Quarter 3. The project developer, Harworth Group appointed council highways partner Amey Plc to work on critical highways infrastructure to be completed by late spring and has appointed a replacement earthworks contractor to prepare the wider site for development. The multi-million-pound development could create up to 1,700 jobs and when the site is fully built out, it could release total business rates of more than £2.5 million per annum. Until March 2041 these business rates will be wholly retained in the local area and can be used to help fund further regeneration schemes.

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 December 2023, the council has supported 624 businesses through the Staffordshire Start Up Programme. Of these, almost half (294) have started trading following the programme. Get Started and Grow has supported 222 business owners who have been trading up to 5 years with professional services support.

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

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
AMBER	GREEN

24. Demand challenges remained in Quarter 3 in relation to the volume of high risk 'Emergency', 'Category 1' and 'Category 2' highways defects identified. This was mostly due to the adverse weather, particularly in December 2023. In December, there were over 2.5 times more high-risk defects identified compared with December 2022. Positively, despite the increase in demand, the timeliness of repairing higher risk defects (against benchmarks) has been maintained (see Appendix 1). To

mitigate against some of the demand challenges that the council is facing, additional resource has now been recruited to the inspection team.

25.As well as these reactive repairs, the council has also continued to successfully deliver its Highway Investment Strategy, with 18 capital structural maintenance schemes completed year to date, including A53 Broad Street, Leek and A511 Ashby Rd, Burton during Quarter 3. Ten more schemes are in design and due to start during Quarter 4. This is in addition to continuing to deliver the Highway Transformation programme of work, with priority projects clearly defined and resource requirements to support delivery outlined.

26.The Government’s Network North announcement included additional highways maintenance funding for all Local Authorities. In Staffordshire this equates to £6.3m between 23/24 and 24/25. For the following 9 years there is £180m remaining but the breakdown of this allocation is yet to be confirmed by the Department for Transport.

27.As part of Project Gigabit, which aims to provide gigabit-capable coverage to Staffordshire residents, Connect Fibre recently won the contract to supply fibre broadband to 5,400 premises (a £16.5m public sector investment) in the north-east of the county. Challenges remain around a high number of premises 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.

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

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
GREEN	GREEN

29.Staffordshire’s Climate Action Fund offers funding assistance to local communities to build resilience and reduce Staffordshire’s contributions to climate change. The deadline for the latest round of applications was 22nd December 2023, with 52 applications received and 33 approvals totalling over £33,400 of potential funding to community groups within Staffordshire.

30.Work to refresh the annual Climate Change Action Plan which identifies the priorities and actions for the year ahead has been completed. This will help the council to play its part in the global effort to reduce the

impact of climate change and meet its net carbon zero target by 2050. This and the Climate Change Annual Report were approved at Cabinet in November. The report highlighted a range of initiatives which have seen a 12% reduction in the authority’s carbon emissions since 2020/21, and a 50% reduction since 2018/19. Further work during Q3 to support these commitments saw the council launch a £10.5 million scheme to help Staffordshire residents heat their homes for less using greener and more energy efficient solutions.

31. The new Household Waste Recycling Centre permit scheme continues to work well with 10,158 permits applied for and 9,931 as of December 2023. Launched in September 2023, the scheme aims to improve services and reduce queues for residents while promoting sustainable waste disposal within the county. The e-permits are free of charge for Staffordshire residents, are valid for 12 months and allow up to 12 visits each year. Under the scheme, vehicles such as vans, pick-up trucks, tipper trucks, minibuses with seats removed and campervans with fixtures and fittings removed all require a permit.

32. How we work

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
GREEN	GREEN

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

34. Good progress can be seen during the quarter as part of the council’s commitment to working with its communities. In November, the [Let’s Talk Staffordshire](#) survey was launched as the next step in the council’s #DoingOurBit campaign, to get residents involved with their communities. The survey is also running alongside a wide range of other engagement activities underway, to help ensure the council reaches as many residents as possible. Staffordshire residents are being asked about what community means to them, how they are helping others in their local area and to collect ideas about how the council can help get more people involved and improve the community in which they live. Findings from the survey, which runs until the end of February 2024, will be used to help develop an ambitious communities strategy for Staffordshire.

35. The council’s Libraries and Arts service, in partnership with The Reading Agency, and funded by Arts Council England delivered a successful Summer Reading Challenge during 2023, and figures became available in Quarter 3. In total 10,675 children signed up to the challenge (a 6.9%

increase compared to 2022) and 6,358 children completed it (a 4.7% increase).

36. Work to deliver the Staffordshire History Centre project remains on track despite recent adverse weather conditions, with most of the structural work to the Grade II* William Salt Library building completed. Volunteer support has been ongoing, between October and December 380 hours were provided by volunteers, valuing £7,605.

37. Digital continues to be fundamental to the way the council works as an organisation, as well as how it interacts with partners, citizens, and communities. Progress has been made across multiple priorities, such as exploring opportunities within the Health & Care and Children & Families service, for automation software to streamline operational processes and free up capacity for added-value work. Work is ongoing with Lichfield District Council (LDC) to progress a collaborative "Single Front Door" approach across Staffordshire. A single Environmental Health customer service process has now been successfully embedded and work progresses on the Disabled Facility Grant Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) pilot. A fourth pilot has been initiated focused on a single Blue Badges process working with Lichfield District Council (LDC) and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC).

38. Work is ongoing to deliver the council's refreshed internal People Strategy and will continue throughout 2024. A new careers website was launched in October to improve the candidate experience and support the council's recruitment process. Since launch to the end of December there have been 10,944 views of the website by 5,601 unique visitors. As at 31st December, time to hire was at 43.8 days, which is below the benchmark of 45 days.

39. There is also a continued focus on workforce absence across the council to help improve the number of 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, half have improved their absence in the last quarter. Work has already been completed to identify the next services for support into Quarter 4. Additionally, absence related surgeries have continued to be provided to wider management teams to help them manage absence.

40. As a result of this work, as at December 2023, long term absence stood at 7.83 days lost per employee, compared to 8.70 days at the same point in 2022 and an improvement from Quarter 2 where performance was 7.86 days. Short-term absence stood at 3.19 days lost per employee compared to 4.04 days at the same point in 2022. Over half of the

workforce has had no sickness absences over the last year (52%, 2,306 people), with a further 23.9% (1,067 employees) having been absent for 5 days or fewer.

41. **Live within our means and deliver value for money**

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
AMBER	GREEN

42. 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.

43. Work has been completed on refreshing the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, and a balanced budget has been achieved for 2024/25. Cabinet has recommended that Council approve this budget at its meeting in February.

44. 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. The council therefore launched the Staffordshire Innovation Challenge in 2023, a cross-organisation approach to discuss and generate innovative ideas and solutions. In recent months there has been a specific focus on ways the council can improve fostering uptake in the county.

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 December 2023, 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 programme.

47. The 2023 Community Fund closed on 31 October 2023. There were 186 applications received from 177 unique organisations, 9 of which were retrospective applications linked to celebratory events for the King's Coronation. The total value of projects in the applications (including the requests from the fund) was c.£760k – this total means that communities offered around £3.73 for every £1 requested from the fund. As a result

of new processes implemented all applications have been processed, approved and all payments have been made to the various Community Groups. An end of year report will be brought to Full Council in July 2024.

48. Legal Implications

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

49. Resource and Value for Money Implications

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

50. Climate Change Implications

There are no direct climate change implications of note.

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Performance Dashboard
- Appendix 2 - Finance Quarter 3 Summary
- Appendix 3 - Finance Quarter 3 Detailed Report
- Appendix 4 - Revenue Forecast Outturn 2023/24
- Appendix 5 - Capital Forecast Outturn 2023/24
- Appendix 6 - Financial Health Indicators 2023/24
- Appendix 7 - Prudential Indicators

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