



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Operating Plan 2025/26

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Introduction

Stoke-on-Trent's Centenary year is rightly a time for commemoration and celebration of the city's illustrious history and heritage, its vibrant cultural identity and its passionate, creative and indomitable spirit. But it is also a time for contemplation of the present and the future. Revisiting and conceptualising 100 years of history and progress also makes it easier to envisage the next century and beyond. For the City Council, the Centenary is a reminder that all actions have consequences, and that consequential decisions can have momentous and far-reaching implications spanning decades and generations. Celebrating the Centenary also compels us, as an organisation, to consider how we can shape our own activity around the needs and requirements of the population we serve –to help them to celebrate their city as successfully as possible.

Crucially, the council has made some progress towards placing its finances on a more stable and sustainable footing for this and future years. The budget approved by the City Council in March avoided large-scale cuts to services or staff but placed greater reliance on efficiency savings and emergency borrowing from central government. It was achieved even though the council's spending has been cut by more than £100 million over the last 15 years. The short-term financial outlook remains extremely challenging, and the requirement to pay back £60 million of government funding in future years will create additional pressures over the longer term. However, by acting decisively to stabilise its finances, the council can focus on delivering transformation and providing vital service improvements for our residents. At the same time, we continue to make the case for a fairer Settlement to government and hope that we will see further progress through the Spending Review.

The Council is also further strengthening its partnerships with other local public services and the voluntary and community sector, as well as with businesses and educational institutions. The importance of cross-sector collaboration is demonstrated by the Family Matters programme, which involves partners from specialist fields joining up to provide support to families who are on the verge of crisis. By pursuing preventative approaches and offering early help interventions to families in need, the programme is helping to reduce demand on statutory frontline services. Working more collaboratively with families and communities is already paying dividends and is creating a blueprint for future partnership working in this critically important area.

Our preventative work with older people and vulnerable adults is having similar impact, as recognised by the Care Quality Commission in our recent inspection. However, we are under no illusions that the pressure on local NHS budgets poses a threat not only to this work but our overall financial position, and we will continue to challenge false economies that will only lead to more pressure on the NHS itself.

This year we want to go further and faster in realising our commitment to communities to enable them to take more control over the places in which they live. That means listening to those communities and then bending our services to ensure

they meet local priorities. It also means giving communities the means to help themselves. Through our Strengthening Communities programme, we will be putting a special focus over this next period on specific neighbourhoods that have missed out over the last few decades, building back social capital in the form of assets and opportunities.

Another key theme for the year ahead is the drive to build more homes while also making the most of the city's unique heritage. Once again, most of our new homes will be built on brownfield sites and we will ensure that many of those homes will be at affordable prices, including for social rent. Across the city's heritage sites there is the potential to provide another 1,000 new homes as well as commercial and community spaces. We are determined to work with Homes England, Historic England and others to bring more of these buildings and spaces back into beneficial use. That will need pragmatism and creativity on everyone's part.

2025/26 is shaping up to be a pivotal year in the city's history. We are rightly proud of everything we have collectively done to build this city over the last 100 years, but we are also confident that brilliant times lie ahead for our amazing city.

Corporate Strategy Vision and Priorities

Our vision

The central aim of the Corporate Strategy is to harness the creativity, fortitude and industry of our residents and the ambition and innovation of our businesses to break the vicious cycle of austerity and develop an environment in which people and institutions can work together to improve the wellbeing of all residents.

Our priorities

1. **A Healthier City:** A healthy standard of living for all – improving healthy life expectancy; increasing participation in physical activity; improving condition of housing.
2. **A Wealthier City:** Enabling greater shared prosperity – tackling fuel poverty; reduce the number of children living in poverty; create more and higher paid jobs for residents.
3. **A Safer City:** Building safe, empowered communities – tackling rough sleeping; preventing and addressing domestic abuse; helping residents in social care settings to feel safer.
4. **A Greener City:** Environment, growth and wellbeing – reducing air pollution levels; encouraging wider use of electric vehicles; encouraging recycling and reducing waste.
5. **A Cleaner City:** Working together to clean up our city – reduce dumping of illegal waste; work with communities to improve local green spaces.
6. **A Fairer City:** Tackling inequality to boost life chances – improving life chances for looked after children and care leavers; improving the school readiness levels of children aged four and five to give them the best start to learning and developing.
7. **A Skilled City:** Ensuring that people who live in Stoke-on-Trent can achieve the qualification and skills that they need to secure good work and build fulfilling lives.

Critical issues that we will address with partners

- **Supporting Family Life** - *Help families to give their children the best start in life, including better housing, education and help when things start to go wrong.*
- **Reclaiming our Streets** – *Enable residents to take back ownership of streets and public spaces, including through a zero-tolerance approach to all types of crime and anti-social behaviour.*
- **Addressing Hardship and Poverty** – *Help those who have least to secure better jobs, higher wages and decent homes; maximise welfare entitlement and tackle debt*
- **Ensuring Decent Homes for All** – *Addressing stock condition across tenures, providing affordable homes and addressing homelessness.*
- **Independent Living** – *supporting residents to live in their own homes; develop housing designed to help elderly or disabled people to continue with the same freedoms as those who are younger or not living with a disability.*

The Organisational Framework

The Organisational Framework is designed to ensure that every team across the organisation is always focused on what it needs to do to improve **outcomes for** residents. It also empowers service teams to have the confidence to develop and transform their services, work to meet this requirement. To be able to do this with confidence, the Council also requires a clear system of accountability that ensures priorities are being delivered and money is being spent wisely. The Organisational Framework is intended to provide a system of development and assurance that should give Members confidence that the Council is performing at a high level. The aim is to create a 'one council' ethos and culture that starts to break down departmental and divisional boundaries to enable and encourage teamwork across different directorates and services where that is likely to be the most effective approach to improving outcomes.

Operating Plan: The annual Operating Plan translates the Corporate Strategy into priorities for delivery and improvement, setting out the allocation of resources in line with the Budget, key performance measures, efficiency and productivity requirements, identified key risks and mitigations and details of key enablers of continuous improvement.

Performance Management: Delivery of the Corporate Strategy will be underpinned by a set of carefully chosen performance indicators which will be closely aligned to the priorities and objectives set out in this document. These performance measures will enable us to gauge the effectiveness of our approaches and assess whether our actions are having the desired impact in relation to the challenges highlighted in this document. Enhanced data collection and visualisation will enable us to achieve a much more detailed understanding of the causes and impacts of the problems which affect residents and communities in Stoke-on-Trent and devise more effective strategies to address them.

Assurance Model – a system of assurance based around the core responsibilities of managers, covering probity, regularity and control; management of budgets; risk identification and mitigation; compliance with audit, statutory requirements and HR processes. The purpose of this system is to ensure rapid escalation and early support to managers and teams that **need support**.

Governance for Delivery - a single governance framework that respects the Council's status as a Member-led authority and accords with a single accountability framework. This includes effective oversight of financial management, commissioning and contract management, commercial activity, digitisation, programme and project delivery, and the organisational establishment.

Organisational Development – enabling functions to ensure that the organisation becomes more integrated, with different teams working together in pursuit of common goals. As a learning organisation committed to continuous improvement, we will provide a system of development and support so that leaders, managers and practitioners have the skills and confidence to deliver agreed priorities.

Guide to the Operating Plan

The opening sections of the Operating Plan describe the overall context and framework in which we are operating and establishes some of the main drivers for the organisation – our financial strategy, our values and behaviours, the strategic factors which are likely to affect the City Council's work over the next year and our planned approaches to mitigating or capitalising on these factors.

The main body of the Plan is divided into nine strategic themes and nine key enabling functions which together encompass and describe most of the work of the City Council. Each theme and function have its own section.

Each of these sections starts with a clear statement of priorities. These are drawn directly for the most part from the Corporate Strategy. There is then a list of the key activities that we are undertaking through the financial year to meet those priorities.

This is followed by a short description of the key improvement projects we are pursuing. Please note that this document does not include detailed plans, milestones, targets for individual activities or projects which should be included in specific service and programme documentation.

For the strategic themes, there is then a description of the main efficiency and productivity commitments we are pursuing. However, again, the deep description will be contained in our Financial Improvement and Productivity plan, due to be signed off in the summer of 2024. In the enabling sections, the efficiency and productivity and improvement projects tend to be the same list and are therefore not presented separately.

There is then a statement of the main operational measures by which we will judge our delivery of the Plan over the short term and will thus be reported on quarterly. The longer-term population measures are contained in the Corporate Strategy and will tend to be reported annually.

For all sections, there is a statement of the key risks that we must mitigate and, where possible, eliminate.

Medium-Term Financial Strategy

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy continues to build on the work that has been done to stabilise our financial position, secure value for money and build financial resilience in the face of continuing pressures due to demand for front line services and the residual impacts of prolonged higher inflation. It has been designed to support the ongoing commitment to a continuous transformation programme that will improve efficiency year-on-year.

The city continues to grapple with significant demand and financial pressures in relation to the provision of Children's Social Care services, although the numbers of children in care have begun to reduce steadily following the introduction and expansion of a range of partnership approaches to family support provision, prevention and early help. As well as reducing the enormous financial strain on resources, these measures aim to deliver significant improvements in the outcomes for children, young people and families in the city.

In line with a growing number of local authorities nationally, the council has factored the use of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from government into its financial planning to create the conditions for improved sustainability. The council has secured approval in principle from the Government for £16.8 million of EFS funding for 2025/26. This will be used to offset up to £11 million of additional expenditure in relation to continuing efforts to manage demand for Children's Social Care and the rising cost of care placements. A further £3 million has been earmarked for investment in transformation programmes to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of key services. In addition, £2.8 million will be used to offset interest costs linked to existing borrowing. The EFS offer is in addition to an existing EFS facility providing £42.2 million for the two previous years (2023-25).

An EFS facility equates to a debt liability, with associated interest costs. The council will be required to repay this liability over the medium-term using future capital receipts or revenue savings and efficiencies. The extension of the EFS funding will mitigate short-term budgetary pressures and facilitate increased investment in transformation and efficiency programmes. However, failure to secure the necessary capital receipts or savings could result in additional budgetary pressures on local services in future years. The council's plan therefore is to repay this borrowing over the medium-term using its pipeline of capital receipts, generated through the disposal of land and property assets. The council would take all steps to reduce and minimise the amount of EFS required and will only draw down on this facility if necessary.

Area	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	Total £m
Children's Social Care placement pressure	10.0	11.5	11.0	32.5
Investment in Early Intervention / Transformation	-	3.0	3.0	6.0
Interest on Initial Borrowing	-	2.2	2.8	5.0
Enabling Investment	3.0	3.0	-	6.0
Financial Resilience (including redundancy costs)	7.5	2.0	-	9.5
Total Exceptional Financial Support	20.5	21.7	16.8	59.0

Future year forecasts are based on the best available information and are subject to increasing levels of uncertainty due to continued volatility in the wider economy and the uncertainty of government funding streams until funding reforms are completed prior to the 2026-27 funding settlement.

It is critical that immediate work on developing further transformation, saving and budget reduction options is embarked upon with immediate effect to address the current funding gap for 2026-27 and ensure that a balanced budget can be set for future years. Whilst the key challenge relates to reducing the cost of Children's Social Care, it will be critical that the city council considers options to reduce costs across all service areas. This is also likely to require ongoing dialogue with government regarding these challenges.

The scale of the budget reductions required and the difficult decisions the city council now faces should not be underestimated and the council will need to work at pace taking early decisions on how costs will be further reduced to ensure it meets its legal obligation to set a budget. Due to the continued and unprecedented levels of demand faced and the absence of further funding support, the risk of a Section 114 notice being issued in future years will remain until a balanced MTFS position has been established.

The medium-term financial strategy was agreed at City Council on 4th March, 2025 and can be read in full at [Budget Council 2025](#). The summary of the plan is captured in the tables below.

Planned Operating Budget & Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2025-2030)

Detail	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s	£'000s
Children and Families	115,624	117,661	117,783	120,046	117,615	117,883
Adult Social Care and All-Age Commissioning	77,352	85,214	90,414	95,675	101,150	102,294
Public Health, Protection and Wellbeing	(577)	(1,036)	(970)	(683)	(386)	(64)
Housing, Regeneration and Operations	34,414	29,873	35,086	36,054	36,075	37,373
Chief Executive	5,348	5,554	5,815	6,066	6,418	6,752
Resources	35,382	35,153	37,187	39,572	39,501	41,086
Directorate Total	267,543	272,419	285,315	296,730	300,373	305,324
<u>Financing and Non-Departmental Costs</u>						
Benefit Payments	1,134	2,328	2,328	2,328	2,328	2,328
Civic & Corporate Expenses	1,625	1,623	1,644	1,657	1,678	1,685
Capital Financing Charges	29,620	35,606	41,409	42,511	43,066	43,642
External Contributions	2,892	2,804	1,595	912	909	909
Other Non-Departmental Costs	(6,808)	(1,440)	(5,268)	(3,750)	750	9,850
Budget Requirement	296,006	313,340	327,023	340,388	349,104	363,738
Funding						
Revenue Support Grant	(28,848)	(29,489)	(30,079)	(30,680)	(31,294)	(31,920)
Retained Non Domestic Rates (Business Rates) including compensatory s31 grants and Top Up grant	(108,559)	(110,172)	(112,488)	(114,813)	(117,239)	(119,710)
Retained Non Domestic Rates returned levy distribution	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)	(1,000)
Collection Fund (surplus) / deficit	2,692	2,699	-	-	-	-
Non-ringfenced grants	(33,973)	(47,401)	(47,212)	(47,212)	(47,212)	(47,212)
Capital Receipts	(3,755)	-	(1,800)	(1,800)	(1,800)	(1,800)
Exceptional Financial Support	(11,500)	(11,000)	-	-	-	-
Total Funding	(184,943)	(196,363)	(192,579)	(195,505)	(198,545)	(201,642)
Future Savings or Management Actions (subject to future financial settlements, etc)	-	-	(10,841)	(14,103)	(12,302)	(15,940)
Council Tax Requirement	111,063	116,977	123,603	130,780	138,257	146,156

Planned capital expenditure (2024-2034)

	2025/26 (£m)	2026/27 (£m)	2027/28 (£m)	2028/29 (£m)	2029/30 (£m)	2030/31 (£m)	2031/32 (£m)	2032/33 (£m)	2033/34 (£m)	2034/35 (£m)
General Fund	133.373	30.396	16.289	14.379	7.619	5.819	5.819	5.819	5.819	3.819
HRA	84.214	82.206	56.73	45.535	44.428	41.219	41.009	40.80	40.591	35.381
Total	217.587	112.602	73.019	59.914	52.047	47.038	46.828	46.619	46.41	39.20

Values and Behaviours

The way that the City Council works and organises itself will be of crucial importance in ensuring that it is able to deliver the Our City, Our Wellbeing corporate vision and priorities effectively. Inevitably, given the picture of rising demand for key services and the pressure on resources, the authority will be reliant on partnership working and collaboration to achieve improved outcomes for residents, businesses and communities. Our corporate values and behaviours are therefore designed to facilitate closer relationships and increased partnership working with other agencies and voluntary and community sector organisations.

Empowerment: We will use our powers and resources and the dedication and expertise of our workforce to benefit the communities which we serve, enabling them to shape more decisions about their lives and local environments. We will consider how our citizens and communities can benefit from every £1 we spend and ensure that more wealth stays within our local economy.

Openness: We will be very clear about the challenges that the Council is facing, how we are going to address them and whether we are making progress. We will always be open to new and better ideas, and will strive to involve our residents, communities and partners in understanding and addressing important issues in our city.

Empathy: We will show that we care about the lives of our residents. We will provide help and support without judgement and will actively seek the views of our citizens to improve the services we deliver. We will always look to find the strengths in any situation as we strive to make our city a better place to live and work in.

Partnership: We will be dedicated and supportive partners to all those who want to make our city a better place, forging strong relationships which span sectors and geographies. We will pool knowledge and resources and seek to develop shared objectives which will benefit the people and communities we serve.

Stewardship: We will take ownership of our commitments and responsibilities, be honest about where we can do better and demonstrate the utmost responsibility for the efficient use of public resources and assets. We will always be transparent about our performance and present clear evidence of the progress that we achieve in delivering this strategy.

Representation: We will champion our city and our citizens at every opportunity, talking up its many strengths and fostering and nurturing civic pride. We will seek to promote our city's culture, heritage and future potential to wider audiences without downplaying the significance of local challenges. We will strive to secure additional resources and opportunities which can unlock better outcomes for all our citizens.

Future 100 – Planning for a Century of Growth and Renewal

During Autumn 2024, the City Council convened the first of a series of workshops with senior leaders from around 30 partner organisations. These workshops helped to shape a set of citywide priorities to deliver long-term, sustainable economic growth, higher living standards and improved outcomes for citizens across a wide range of metrics. To complement this work, delegates also took part in a critical appraisal of existing partnership governance structures. The aims were to streamline them into a more dynamic, inclusive and purposeful framework capable of enabling more place-based and solution-focused approaches to strategic planning to address local challenges and opportunities more effectively.

February saw the launch of the Future 100 City Prospectus – an integrated plan to deliver sustainable growth and improved outcomes for our city. The prospectus, which was delivered to 10 Downing Street on the day of publication, showcases Stoke-on-Trent as a nationally important engine of creativity, innovation and growth. It makes a compelling case for targeted support and investment to transform the local economy and the wellbeing of our residents by addressing critical infrastructure gaps, boosting skills development, fostering innovation and supporting the ceramics sector. It invites the Government to partner with us to deliver these crucial improvements and help to build a Stoke-on-Trent fit for the next 100 years.

The plan at the centre of the Future 100 programme is designed to enable and accelerate the sustainable growth of Stoke-on-Trent's economy. The plan addresses the series of wide-ranging, linked factors which will determine the city's economic future. It is based around five core 'missions':

1. Securing economic growth;
2. Delivering clean energy, sustainable transport and an improved local environment;
3. Regenerating our city;
4. Removing barriers to opportunity;
5. Improving the health and wellbeing of our population.

For each of these missions, which closely align with the Government's own 'Five Missions for Britain' as well as elements of the council's own corporate strategy, the prospectus sets out our key asks from central government, as well as the outcomes that we plan to deliver and a set of practicable performance measures.

The Future 100 programme will be gathering pace over the next 12 months as we work to establish the new Strategic Board and accompanying mission boards which will oversee and guide delivery of the prospectus goals. These boards will not have statutory decision-making powers, but will exist alongside our corporate structures to strengthen collaboration, strategic planning and programme delivery and give partners a greater say in shaping partnership approaches to citywide issues. A draft delivery plan has already been constructed for testing with partners and Government, comprising twelve ambitious projects across the five missions.

Transformation and Change Management

Ongoing transformation programmes across Children and Families, Adult Social Care and All-Age Commissioning, Public Health, Protection and Wellbeing, and Housing, Regeneration and Operations have the potential to deliver millions of pounds in efficiency savings year-on-year, as well as improving the quality of services and key outcomes for citizens of all ages who rely upon them.

The Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Transformation Programme

The City Council has invested in a new digital programme to improve the management of day-to-day business activities throughout the organisation. The programme covers all the council's HR, payroll and finance data. A new SAP (systems, applications and products) digital system will transform outdated processes and bring services together in more innovative and accessible ways for all staff to use. Increased use of automation within the SAP system will streamline information management to improve decision making and efficiency. The SAP will replace the Resource Link HR system and the Civica finance and purchasing system but will also feed into more universal self-service interfaces such as the annual leave booking system. This major overhaul of the council's digital infrastructure will deliver a modern, fully integrated and automated digital solution which will create a unified data source, deliver simpler, more efficient processes and provide more user-friendly features for staff throughout the organisation.

Children and Families transformation

The directorate is delivering a new strategic approach, focusing on early intervention, prevention and partnership working, which aims to reduce the number of children in care in Stoke-on-Trent by providing more effective family support and appropriate interventions. The city has recorded the highest rates of looked-after children nationally in recent years – a factor which has created unsustainable demand and financial pressures for children's services and the council. An important and challenging goal of the transformation approach is enabling more children to remain safely at home with their families. Research has shown that this can dramatically improve long-term outcomes for everyone involved. The work is in its early stages and there is still much improvement that is required in our overall offer to children, young people and families. We expect to accelerate progress in 2025/26.

Adult Social Care transformation

The Adult Social Care Transformation plan aims to manage demand for health and care services and improve outcomes for citizens by providing more timely, personalised and integrated support and giving people greater choice over the types of services they can access and how and where they can access them. Incorporating an overarching 'prevent, reduce, delay' approach into early decisions regarding care

needs aims to ensure that independence and enablement are at the heart of care planning for all users. Similarly, the service is piloting new approaches to maintaining health and reducing and delaying frailty to enable more people to live safely at home and to manage their health and wellbeing with professional support. Opening access to early assessment and offering health checks in community venues is also part of the drive to identify opportunities to intervene earlier and prevent health issues becoming debilitating. Involving people with lived experience in the co-production of new approaches to service delivery is also part of the transformation programme. There has been recent encouragement from our CQC inspection that we are on the right track but there is still scope for further improvement, particularly in the timeliness of assessments and reviews.

Housing, Regeneration and Operations

Several transformation projects are being progressed throughout the directorate with the aim of designing and delivering more efficient, joined up and responsive services which can deliver transformative benefits for residents, including council tenants.

A major transformation project within Environmental Services has been the development of the Garden Waste Subscription Service – enabling residents to sign up online at any time of year to receive and pay for fortnightly collections. The project exceeded its original revenue generation target of £456,000 within the first month after its launch in March 2024, and has achieved more than double this amount in the same period this year.

Environmental Services is also leading a complex transformation programme to ensure that markets across the city are fit for purpose and financially viable, as well as being able to meet future challenges. The Markets Transformation Project aims to develop long-term strategic plans for the markets service as a whole and for each individual market based on their unique identity and location. Digitalisation is being employed to modernise the service and improve the consistency and efficiency of service delivery.

The decision to bring the housing maintenance and repairs service back in-house opens an opportunity for significant transformation in our overall housing and neighbourhood management offer, with a more joined up and proactive approach. Although we already enjoy high satisfaction levels among our tenants and leaseholders, we want to do even better, particularly with respect to repairs performance,

Elsewhere in the directorate, the IDOX Cloud system will transform the way in which the council handles planning applications, improving case management and decision-making, as well as providing more timely and transparent progress updates for applicants and enabling staff to make more efficient use of time and resources due to the reduction in unnecessary enquiries.

Transforming Places, Improving Lives

The City Council is working closely with national and local partners to develop and progress a range of initiatives and regeneration programmes which will breathe new life into neglected areas of our city, creating thriving places with quality housing, high streets, amenities and public spaces.

Housing and regeneration

The pipeline of developments which are expected to take shape over the next 12 months includes:

- Development of the first phase plan for the regeneration of Etruscan Square, in the City Centre. Phase 1 will deliver 150 new homes and the full scheme is expected to deliver around 400 new homes as well as leisure facilities and commercial space.
- Completion of the Stoke town High Street Accelerator programme – a government-funding pilot project to improve the attractiveness of the high street, reduce empty shops and revitalise the town centre.
- The flagship Goods Yard heritage regeneration project, on the canal embankment in Stoke, is nearing completion and will open to the public on schedule in the spring. The development will have created more than 230 jobs and will deliver 174 quality apartments, as well as offices and 1,500m² of retail space.
- The renovation of a historic courtyard at the former Spode pottery site, in Stoke, will preserve surviving bottle kilns and create an improved green space for workers and visitors.
- The public opening of the Chatterley Court independent living complex, in Chell Heath. The facility will provide 113 apartments for over-55s who need on-site support to live independently.
- Improvements to Longton, Tunstall and Burslem public realm.
- The expansion of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery to accommodate an expanded range of collections and exhibitions.
- Redevelopment of the Cliffe Vale part of the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone to create new jobs and inward investment.
- Progressing the Council's Housing Pipeline of c4,800 new homes across 22 sites with start on site expected in 2025 for Wellfield, Booth Street, Doris Robinson Court and the former Edensor high school.

Community investment and renewal

As well as progressing a range of physical regeneration projects to boost economic growth, prosperity and job creation in the city, and the City Council and partners are also focusing on initiatives aimed at tackling the causes and impacts of socio-economic deprivation in the worst-affected areas of the city. Programmes and initiatives which are now under way or being planned include:

- An allocation of £4.4 million from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which will be used to deliver a raft of projects, including initiatives aimed at tackling anti-social behaviour, reducing financial hardship, boosting adult skills and employability and supporting creative projects to brighten up city neighbourhoods.
- Expansion of the Family Matters partnership programme, which helps struggling families by providing timely support and addressing problems before they reach crisis point. This preventative approach has helped 1,100 children in the past year, reducing the number who end up in care and enabling more youngsters to safely remain with their families.
- An ongoing partnership approach to community wealth building, which aims to channel investment and support into growing more community-owned businesses and transforming council-owned sites into vital community assets.
- Expanding the city's bus network through the council's Bus Service Improvement Plan. An additional £9.9 million investment this year will enable the creation of additional routes and services to allow more people to access education, employment and local services more easily and more affordably.
- Working with several of the city's most deprived neighbourhoods to boost community empowerment, improve access to community facilities and reduce persistent inequalities through the Strengthening Communities initiative.
- A £3.4 million allocation from the Government's Warm Homes: Local Grant scheme to help homeowners and private tenants reduce their heating bills through energy efficiency improvements. Stoke-on-Trent has the highest proportion of households in fuel poverty nationally, with one in four homes affected (24.7 per cent).

Strategic Themes

1 – Children, Young People and Families

Key priorities

1. Improve attainment and educational outcomes for all children in the city. We will develop a new Education Strategy with schools, Multi Academy Trust (MAT) partners and young people.
2. Increase the number of young people post-16 who are in employment, education, or training. This focus includes children and young people with SEND, and those with a social worker and/or cared for.
3. Increase the inclusivity of our mainstream schools to ensure that all children, where appropriate, can be successful in their local mainstream school.
4. Improve attendance of all children and young people in the city, incorporating a reduction in suspensions and exclusions.
5. Complete development of City-wide Youth strategy with additional investment to create opportunities for our young people.
6. Implement a Families First partnership approach in Stoke-on-Trent which, when it is safe, supports children to continue to live within their family or family networks by providing integrated support through multi-agency collaboration which focuses on prevention rather than crisis intervention and which also supports more children to be reunified to live with their family.
7. Improve the consistency in our child protection work to ensure that children who need help are always identified quickly and receive the right support at pace for as long as they need it and in the most appropriate place.
8. Ensure continued effective response to child exploitation, including threat of gangs and grooming.
9. When it is in the child's best interest to remain cared for, we will ensure their home offers stable, consistent and continuity of care from their carer who has access to the right support and development opportunities to ensure children experience the best outcomes and can continue to live within their community close to family and friends.
10. Continue to progress plans for permanence for children in care through identification of a range of permanence which supports timely forever homes being identified.
11. Radically improve our offer to care leavers to give them the very best chance of a happy and fulfilled adult life.
12. Ensure the voices of children and families are heard on an individual and collective level to inform co-produced service development based on individual and local needs.

Main Improvement Projects

- Complete and launch a new City Skills and Employment Framework

- Redesign of our early years team to enable deployment of Early Years Advisors to improve outcomes and transitions to primary education
- Deliver a refreshed approach to school improvement by operationalising the support to schools causing concern following the Department for Education's introduction of the RISE teams
- Implement a refreshed Quality Assurance education framework to meet cross service requirements to operate across specialist provision, Alternative Provision (AP) and mainstream schools. Extend current Section19 QA and Monitoring Framework across all LA commissioned Education AP.
- Launch the Stoke E Prospectus to support increasing the number of young people in Education, Employment or Training (EET)
- Co-create with schools, trusts, parents, and young people an Inclusion Charter for the city to foster a commitment to more inclusive practice within mainstream schools and colleges. This will enable an environment where all children and young people regardless of ability, background or additional needs are supported to learn, participate, and thrive alongside their peers.
- Prepare to deliver all aspects of Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill in relation to 'Not on a School Roll' (NOSR) and Elective Home Education (EHE).
- Develop specialist multi-agency AP provision for children with the most challenging behaviours.
- Deliver our SEND and AP Development Plan, including a pilot of a coproduced locality-based model for the delivery of SEND services and support in the city, and monitor the impact ahead of a citywide rollout
- Develop a placement sufficiency plan that sets out the specialist provision needed in the city over the coming 5-7yrs, linked to a revised high needs capital plan. This will include requirements for additional education/medical support/provision for CYP with additional health/medical needs.
- The Virtual School in conjunction with the EPS will deliver a Relational Approaches in Education Project, to ensure all schools are attachment aware and trauma informed, which is reflected in their practice and policies.
- Deliver a SEND participation approach and continue to develop our adoption of co-production, embedding the voice of children, young people, and families in all we do.
- Strengthen and enhance the early support landscape, the development of family hubs in the city and the development of a ten-year youth strategy that is co-produced with all local stakeholders including young people.
- Embed the recommendations from the recent OFSTED Inspection in a refreshed children's social care Improvement Plan with clear milestones for delivery, focusing on areas of identified weakness
- Agree and roll-out an enhanced offer for all care leavers to facilitate a seamless transition to independent living, with appropriate support.
- Overhaul the Quality Assurance framework for children's social care to increase consistent and impact of all QA work, with strong emphasis on importance of children and carers' voices.
- Ensure sufficiency of homes for cared for children and care leavers through our ongoing Placement Delivery framework.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments.

- Deliver a reduction in permanent exclusions and the associated need for Alternative Provision.
- Ensure that there is a clear business case for the delivery of any traded services – specifically refocussing of the support provided by the local authority (free and traded) to schools through education welfare and SEND
- Work towards delivering a balanced in-year position on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This will include addressing the growing deficit on the high needs block through developing and delivering a new DSG management plan to replace previous safety valve agreements.
- Negotiate favourable contracts with independent education and care providers and alternative provisions to secure competitive pricing, including use of block contracts and long-term collaborative models.
- Identify and pilot opportunities for the use of AI across service delivery to free up officer time to work directly with families and education settings
- Through the Families First Partnership programme, ensure that children and families have their needs met at the earliest opportunity ensuring the right service is in place at the right time which, over time, should lead to fewer children requiring statutory plans or becoming cared for.

Key Measures

- Early Development Scores
- Progress made between Key Stage 2 & 4 (Progress 8)
- Key Stage 5 average points score
- Percentage of eligible children accessing funded 2-year-old places
- % Attendance for all sectors (including vulnerable cohorts)
- NEET and Not Known Combined figures for 16-19
- Percentage 16-19 In-Learning
- Percentage of Children in Care and Care Leavers who are NEET
- Numbers Permanent Exclusion and Suspensions
- Percentage of EHCP plans issued within 20 weeks
- Percentage of EHCP Annual Reviews completed on time
- Percentage of children with an EHCP educated in a mainstream school
- Initial PEP completion rates are within the timescale of 14 days
- PEP Quality Assurance levels
- Timeliness of all children's social care processes
- Percentage of child social care plans/files audited as Good or Outstanding practice.
- Number of internal foster carers
- Number of children in independent residential homes
- Percentage of relevant cases in which Family Group Conferences are held
- Care leaver suitable accommodation, EET and In Touch figures
- Number of children re-admitted into care within 12 months
- Number of Repeat child protection plans within 12 months
- Number of early help and partner led early help plans
- Youth Reoffending Rate
- Annual care leavers satisfaction survey

Main Risks

- Expected changes to legislation and policy by central government which extend and/or change responsibilities / priorities e.g. DfE or Ofsted regulations (e.g. funding rules, eligibility criteria, inspection frameworks)
- Reduction in core funding from DfE or other sources for adult and community learning
- Financial risk related to reduction of traded Education Welfare work with schools and investment of income from fines into project work
- Limited ability to control spend within agreed budget levels on the DSG due to elevated levels of demand for statutory services
- Lack of long-term clarity on the national direction of deficits on the DSG with the statutory override currently set to end in 2026. National policy announcements on SEND likely to require legislative changes to have meaningful impact.

- Uncertainty over funding commitments from the ICB and their ability to successfully engage in key activities set out in the Social Care, SEND and AP Improvement Plans
- A reversal in the stability of staffing could compromise both quality of practice as well as lead to an increase in agency worker costs.
- A lack of placement sufficiency has led to too many children living in residential children's homes. This places additional financial pressure on the city council.
- Necessary costs of compliance with OFSTED findings and recommendations
- As we implement Transformation changes because of the government reforms there is a risk of compromising practice consistency and quality which will be mitigated by a robust programme management and quality assurance approach.
- Safeguarding of children is compromised due to the additional demand in social work and care services from an increasing number of referrals to the city council.

2 – Adult Care and Welfare

Key Priorities

1. Promote the integration of health and care services to provide a seamless approach to those who need support
2. Implement the Adult Social Care Transformation plan to ensure timely access to support, using a strengths-based model based on the principles of personalisation and integration, and the development of a diverse and high-quality market offer,
3. Provide stronger, more integrated support for carers.
4. Develop and implement strategies to recruit, retain, and develop a highly skilled adults' workforce.
5. Support communities to live well and thrive through embedding a diverse community presence and responses to need and improving wellbeing.
6. Ensure that the service is legally and regulatory compliant and managing to budget based on the principle of safety and quality first.
7. Implement delivery models in our Provider Services that deliver quality and efficient services in short-term, enabling interventions and long-term complex care.

Main Improvement Projects

- Promoting Independence: Embedding Enablement service in Front Door offer, ensuring all new care needs are progressed via the service to maximise our prevent, reduce, delay approach
- Assessment & Decision-Making: Reduce waiting lists and modernize the operational model to ensure it is fit for purpose via restructure and role optimisation.
- Promoting Independence: Further develop the Community Lounge model to include intergenerational offer aligned with Family Hubs and care leavers offer.
- Early Intervention & Prevention: Deliver integrated low frailty model in north of City with health, community and sector partners
- Vulnerable Adults: Develop sustainable long-term model to succeed Changing Futures programme that is due to end in March 2026.
- Data: Full delivery of the Data Systems Transformation and Quality Improvement programme.
- Transitions: Embed transitions service and vision, including delivery of new Transitions procedure. This should include earlier planning with CYP and families for transition to adult services.
- Working Age Adult Enablement: Implement new service that improves skills of working age population who have needs to promote independence
- Dementia Care: Implement new optimised step-up dementia model, co-produced with partners and those with lived experience.

- Assessment & care planning: Review of SCOTS team to optimise model and integrate with wider Disabled Facility Grant duties and corporate response to Foundations adaptations review.
- Neighbourhood Health: Facilitate delivery of new Neighbourhood Health Service through the Provider Collaborative.
- Crisis Response: remodel step-up and step-down provision to reduce the number of older people requiring hospital admission and to ensure effective rehabilitation upon discharge.
- Independent Living: Working with housing, finalise and accelerate delivery of supported accommodation options for working age adults and older people.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments

- Increase numbers and quality of carers' assessments.
- Decrease in median wait time for statutory assessments.
- Increase fees and charges income.
- Decrease in numbers placed in 24-hour care.
- Working age adults reviews will increase number of people with their own front door.
- Fairer Funding: Implement "fairer funding" approach in partnership with Children's and Family Services to maximise cases where the right to NHS funding is identified.
- Increase uptake of Direct Payments and use of micro-providers.
- Optimise use of AI & digital, including evaluation of Magic Notes pilot.

Key Measures

- Numbers of outstanding Care Act assessments
- Numbers of outstanding Deprivation of Liberty requests
- Number of unmet, assessed care hours
- Numbers of safeguarding referrals
- Timeliness of handling safeguarding enquiries
- Customer feedback on safety (Making Safeguarding Personal).
- % of social care recipients on personal budget/direct payment.
- Reviews completed/outstanding.
- Number and Timeliness of Carer Assessments (subset of assessments).
- Percentage of working age adults with social care package living independently in the community.
- Percentage of older people with social care package living in their own home.
- Readmission rate for those discharged from hospital on a social care pathway.
- Number of agreed home care hours against target.
- Adult Social Care: satisfaction with services (percentage).
- Quality of Life score for Older People (65+) receiving social care services

- Quality of Life score for Working Age Adults (18-64) receiving social care services.
- Average age at which transition work commences with young people nearing adulthood
- Proportion of adults with learning disabilities in education, employment or training.

Main Risks

- Demand: Extensive waiting lists and increasing complexity and demand.
- Recruitment and Retention: Recruitment and retention of staff, particularly in experienced professional roles.
- Funding context: Significant pressure on NHS budgets nationally and locally driving costs towards local authority
- Care Market Capacity: Reduction in 24-hour placements dependent on diverse market in supporting living and appropriate properties.
- Provider failure: challenging financial leading to hand-backs of care packages that diverts operational time and capacity.

3 – Public Health Protection and Wellbeing

Key Priorities

1. Work with NHS on the design and implementation of an all-age mental wellbeing plan with tangible impact on mental health rates.
2. Increase physical activity rates in deprived areas with secured additional investment (particularly with Sport England) and the implementation of associated plan.
3. Implement a new Leisure and Wellbeing service providing a wider range of services to keep people well. This will be through a wider range of lifestyle improvement, re-habilitation and pre-habilitation services across the estate.
4. Enhance play provision in deprived areas (linked to Family Matters). There will be a wide range of play opportunities in key deprived areas across the city, available at different times of the day and week, to ensure equitable access for all.
5. Implement several Early Help, Health and Prevention Programmes that improve and support healthy childhoods. To include Infant Mortality action plan, Infant Feeding, Healthy Weights and NCMP, Oral Health, Family Hub Delivery and Emotional Health and Wellbeing.
6. Deliver the outcomes of the review of Domestic Abuse provision in the city.

Main Improvement Projects

- Develop and invest in preventative approaches to mental ill health by working in partnership to create and deliver the Mental Health Concordat Action Plan, prevent suicide and enhance existing Children and Young People Emotional Health and Wellbeing services in line with needs and best practice.
- Broaden access to physical activity through expanding preventative programmes, particularly for older adults, empowering them to stay active and engaged, preventing the development of long-term health conditions. This will be achieved through: The development of muscular-skeletal (MSK) hubs in centres, GP and self-referral pathways into the Wellbeing and Leisure Service (WLS), and the growth of our outreach delivery offer.
- Deliver a robust and collaborative Play workstream to prevent children and families living in crisis, which can result in children entering the care system. We will develop partnership working with locally trusted organisations (LTOs) to develop a comprehensive city-wide offer.
- Launch our new smoking cessation service that will enhance the commissioned offer across the city to reduce tobacco related health issues, helping more residents and their families to live healthier, safer lives.
- Reprogramme the WLS service, focusing on all aspects of wellbeing (Physical, Mental, Social, Financial) and enhancing the delivery of our community health and wellbeing programme, building relationships with health partners. The overarching ambition is to reduce health inequalities and improve social and health outcomes across the city.

- Introduce a fit for purpose Leisure Management System (LMS) that will improve customer output for the service, enable data led decision making, improve the customer interaction / journey and allow for effective monitoring and control of our services.
- Develop a refreshed sexual health strategy for Stoke-on-Trent through a multi-agency and community informed sexual health needs assessment.
- Develop a new health protection strategy for Stoke-on-Trent to measure and improve Stoke-on-Trent's resilience against key health threats.
- Digitally transform public protection services to improve all service level and public facing operations across environmental health and trading standards.
- Develop a programme of work focused on Health Inequality to understand the needs of our city so we can shape services to address population need.
- Extend the reach of the 0-19 (Health visiting and School Nursing) by investing in further development checks and support for more vulnerable mothers as part of the Family matters programme. This will be informed by carrying out a 0-19 Needs Assessment to review current delivery of the 0-19 service and Healthy Child Programme.
- Establish the city-level Domestic Abuse governance and develop a clear strategy and plan to implement the outcomes of the recent external review.

Efficiency and Productivity Projects

- Develop and invest in preventative approaches to mental ill health.
- Recommission smoking cessation services to increase capacity, throughput and quality
- Expand the digital format for Public Protection formal investigations, including evidence logging and production of prosecution reports, to include a wide variety of sanctions

Key Measures

- Full Suite of Public Health Outcome Measures
- Total Leisure Centre Membership retention and growth
- Total Gymnastics Classes participation
- Weight & Wellbeing Programme – Uptake in session capacity.
- Total Swimming Lesson Attendance – Uptake in lesson capacity.
- People setting a smoking quit date achieving a 4-week quit (%)
- NHS health checks received out of those invited
- Total Value of Illegal and Unsafe Goods removed from or prevented from entering the market - Rolling 12 month (£)

Main Risks

- Work with NHS on the design and implementation of an all-age mental wellbeing plan with tangible impact on mental health rates.
 - Multi-agency working
 - Lack of data sharing
 - Skills, knowledge and capacity of existing team
- Broaden access to physical activity/enhancing our leisure centres
 - Aging and inefficient portfolio of stock
 - Horizon scanning indicates the industry shift of traditional leisure services becoming active wellbeing providers
 - Failure to implement an effective leisure management system will mean we do not have the necessary technology to drive our commercial offer forwards, impacting the delivery of the wider transformation programme.
 - Utility costs – Wholesale unit price increases do influence service cost, subject to SoTCC securing a competitive fixed rate.
 - The implementation of ineffective or miscalculated business cases may not deliver the desired savings.
 - Ineffective cost control or budget overspend
 - A lack of appropriate engagement / consultation around the transformation programme, LUP projects and business cases.
 - Competing demands to redevelop sites for housing and business development which include playing pitches
 - Lack of suitability skilled workforce.
- Developing the sexual health and health protection strategies
 - Risk of insufficient engagement from system partnerships, particularly in the context of limited financial and operational resources
- Digitally transform public protection services
 - Project has wide dependencies across a range of enabling services in the council within operating year, with the risk of delays where any single partner is affected by capacity constraints.

4 – Housing Management and Maintenance (Landlord Function)

Key Priorities

1. Improve the quality of the neighbourhood service for our own housing stock and HRA estates to ensure tenant and property-based issues are identified and resolved at an early stage.
2. Ensure systems of compliance are in place for the housing regulatory regime to provide internal and external levels of assurance against the regulatory code.
3. Ensure new policies/procedures/strategies are in place for new legislation including Awaab's Law, Professionalisation, Right to Buy.
4. Full review of the 30-year HRA Business Plan to ensure maximum use of resources to invest in existing and new properties alongside efficient services.
5. Establish new operating model for repairs and maintenance service post Unitas to operate Housing as a seamless service, securing improvements in performance and higher levels of satisfaction.

Main Improvement Projects

- Develop new tenancy agreement to strengthen action and protect tenants and properties which are blighted by the actions of others.
- Develop further automated forms to enable greater use of hand-held devices on patch working and automation.
- Introduce AI driven rent and debt control process.
- Deliver against the actions identified in the Complaint Handling Review and areas of improvement identified by the Housing Ombudsman.
- Finalise and implement an end-to-end process to comply with Awaab's law.
- Deliver outcome of Tower Blocks review
- Delivery of improvement programme for end-to-end management of responsive repairs.
- Remodel 30-year HRA Business Plan based on outcome of external review and implement refreshed planned works programme.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments

- Review rents, income and service charges and debt to balance income to the HRA against affordability for tenants and leaseholders.
- Roll out handheld devices to housing and estates officers to maximise time on patch, productivity and real-time reporting/action
- Review best use of stock by joining up decision making and integrating teams associated with voids, adaptations and major works
- Review roles associated with customer/client activities and long-term vacant posts across the section

- Use AI in debt and income collection
- Appraise disrepair project outcomes and mainstream function
- End to end review of repairs and maintenance operational practices to drive greater efficiency and productivity, as well as improving consistency of quality

Key Measures

- % of stock that is decent
- Numbers of damp and mould referrals
- Higher tenant satisfaction levels
- Higher rent collection / lower rent arrears
- Reduced percentage of stage 1 complaints moved to stage 2
- Reduced adverse Ombudsman outcomes
- Number of long-term voids brought back into use
- Number of evictions and notices because of enforcement action
- Reduced compensation through disrepair claims
- Improved repairs and maintenance performance across all relevant measures
- No self-referrals to Regulator based on current operational actions.

Key Risks

- Mandated Regulatory inspection because of self-referral or publicly identified legislative failure
- Inability to deliver services and property decency due to HRA Finances
- Barriers in terms of cultural changes required within the newly integrated in-house service.
- Resource Management resulting from regulatory requirements
- Cost of Living issues impact on levels of arrears
- Professionalisation of staff within Housing may result in loss of expertise and / or additional training and development costs across the workforce.
- Poor inspection rating.

5 – Homelessness, Private Sector Housing and Community Safety

Key Priorities

1. Improve provision and services for those in the most severe housing need, including better day and night support services for rough sleepers, consistent use of integrated need assessments and access to the most appropriate housing
2. Contribute to multi-agency plan agreed to improve the city's visual and feel making it family friendly (output measures will be reduced ASB, street drinking/drug taking and rough sleeping)
3. Develop and deliver solutions to keep people out of hotels and hostels and into more appropriate accommodation, including move-on
4. Deliver energy efficiency improvements within the private sector
5. Deliver strategy to bring empty homes into use in the city and to support the provision of affordable move on accommodation
6. Reduce waiting times for OT assessments and adaptations delivery
7. Support Operation Levidrome to counter cannabis cultivation in abandoned buildings 'Grass a Grow!'
8. Develop the Making Great Places approach to deliver a strong partnership model of prevention, intelligence, response and enforcement right across the community safety agenda, with a particular focus on crime and anti-social behaviour
9. Develop and implement the 'One Stoke' programme to promote and improve community cohesion in the city
10. Increase enforcement to protect tenants from bad landlords and undertake research on need for measures to combat any proliferation of HMOs in certain parts of the city
11. Ensure effective downsizing policy in place and Homeswapper policy is reviewed.

Main Improvement Projects

- Support delivery and monitor progress against all the priorities identified in the Community Safety Strategy and associated performance framework via the Community Safety Partnership Board appropriately utilising partnership funding to support this work
- Through partner and public consultation, identify and deliver robust crime and ASB reduction initiatives, as part of the Design out Crime project working closely with the Public Realm project to ensure planned works complement both projects and deliver strong outcomes
- Improve experience and customer satisfaction in relation to how ASB is managed across the city in line with the regulatory framework
- Work with partners to identify and proactively intervene to reduce thematic incidents of ASB causing community concern. Continue to develop the Op Transom response as part of this work

- Deliver the objectives of the One Stoke Board including enhanced community engagement supported by the delivery of community grants leading to the development of a joint Community Cohesion Strategy for the city
- In response to Southport and as part of the national Prevent Sub Threshold Pilot, work to influence the development of appropriate partnership arrangements and oversight of Prevent referrals that would have previously failed to meet the Prevent threshold where a risk of violence is identified. Engage with national process and monitoring to influence this work
- Continue to deliver our statutory responsibilities to prevent violent extremism specifically ensuring the Channel Panel is effective and there is ongoing training of staff at the council
- Produce a revised Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy and an action plan to support it
- Commission/design new services to include more emphasis on homeless prevention including at critical transition points such as prison release and hospital discharge, better engagement with the private rented sector as part of an enhanced move on programme, alternatives to B&B for temporary accommodation, an immediate off the street offer for rough sleepers and enhanced daytime provision and targeted intensive interventions for entrenched rough sleepers
- Improve day and night support offer for rough sleepers and those in hostel accommodation.
- Ensure compliance to regulatory standards in preparation for future inspection through the Regulator of Social Housing
- Develop a new Community Cohesion Strategy for the city which is owned and supported by partners
- Support the Corporate Parenting Board by leading on the Safe and Stable Homes element of the Delivery Plan.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments

- Generate additional income through tackling substandard homes in the private rented sector including refreshing the fees and charges for enforcement activity to fund an increase in activity, delivering new provisions within the Renters Rights Act and Awaab's Law and targeted activity on HMOs
- Continue to drive down void relet times including pursuing HQN Accreditation
- Review and implement data driven, digital and Artificial Intelligence opportunities to improve efficiency and productivity commitments.

Key Measures

- Housing void average turnaround time.
- Number of households in temporary accommodation.
- Number of rough sleepers

- Number of empty homes brought back into use.
- Number of households in B&B accommodation.
- Percentage of homelessness successfully prevented/relieved.
- Housing disability adaptations.
- Recorded Crime Overall
- Violent Crime
- Anti-Social Behaviour incidents recorded

Main Risks

- Demand for emergency accommodation and homelessness applications increasing/remaining high
- Increases in Homelessness/Rough Sleeping & Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour due to system failures and/or lack of resources
- Negative Impact on Community Cohesion resulting from the Civil Disorder in August 2024
- Organisation arrangements and systems for responding to Major Incidents/Emergencies are inadequate e.g. cyber incident or power outage.

6 – Environment, Transport and Operations

Key Priorities

1. Keep the city clean and tidy by ensuring services are delivered in a timely manner and meet agreed quality standards.
2. Develop a refreshed climate change mitigation and adaptation plan, and play a full contribution to the development of the county-wide nature recovery strategy
3. Provide high quality parks and green spaces facilitating increased usage and resident satisfaction.
4. Continue to improve waste collection and recycling services, with a focus on waste prevention, increased recycling rates, food waste collection and development of circular economy.
5. Develop the Local Transport Plan including improved bus services, active travel and roll-out of EV charging infrastructure.
6. Improve air quality in the city.
7. Strive to eradicate environmental crime in our city, with a particular focus on Illegal dumping
8. Effectively and efficiently manage the entire lifecycle of highway and drainage assets, ensuring their optimal performance, safety, and sustainability.
9. Co-ordinate emergency planning and business continuity for the council and the city.
10. Develop a multi-disciplinary enforcement team incorporating ASB, Environmental Crime and Civil (Parking) enforcement including the use of relevant technology.

Main Improvement Projects

- Complete the development and sign-off of the climate change mitigation and adaptation plan.
- Facilitate delivery of the county-wide nature recovery strategy and enable effective use of Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Complete preparations for Food Waste collections
- Use the Active Travel Fund to promote healthier and greener transport options by facilitating the development of sustainable infrastructure that encourages and supports active modes of travel such as walking and cycling, making the most of our Public Rights of Way Network.
- Ongoing review of our markets offer and operations, continuing to implement creative solutions to optimise the use of these important community amenities.
- Ensure that the Streetworks Lane Rental Scheme enhances congestion management, leading to improved traffic flow, reduced delays, and contributing to cleaner air quality because of minimised vehicular emissions.
- Meet all plans and targets for maintenance of a high-quality highway network.
- Continue delivery of the drive against environmental crime in the city, using enhanced resources to enforce against perpetrators and thus keep the city clean.
- Complete fleet review to ensure efficient utilisation and dispose of redundant vehicles/plant.

- Deliver an enhanced public parking model for the town of Burslem and a structured approach to prioritisation of community care park schemes
- Continue to leverage artificial intelligence for highway inspections, enabling safer more efficient and targeted interventions, contributing to substantial greener infrastructure maintenance and development.
- Review and improve children's fixed play equipment in different parts of the city.
- Strengthen enforcement, including planning enforcement with respect to private owners of heritage assets that are neglected.
- Expand and flex IDIOT and DRIVE campaigns as makes sense to achieve objectives.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments

- Maximise income generation via commercial work and sponsorship
- Support the Digital First agenda of the council, all frontline, responsive services will take advantage of technological processes, including mobile working; job scheduling and provision of updates directly to customers across various channels.
- Complete external review of waste and recycling service to identify any further opportunities for efficiency and productivity gains.

Key Measures

- Council carbon emission levels.
- Highways reactive – number of defects completed and average time taken to complete.
- Highways reactive – average time taken to complete.
- Number of missed bins.
- Number of reported incidents of fly tipping.
- Average time taken to remove fly tipping (working days).
- Number of reported incidents of graffiti.
- Average time taken to remove graffiti (working days).
- Total number and value of fines issued for environmental offences.
- Miles of highway reconditioned.
- Waste disposal tonnage.

Main Risks

- Funding for vehicle replacement programme to enable the introduction of the latest technologies to support net zero including the introduction of alternatively fuelled vehicles/plant.
- Recruitment & retention of qualified staff.
- Funding for Cromer Road depot and facilities to 'future proof' the site and maximise efficient use and reduce energy use.

7 – Investment, Delivery and Growth

Key Priorities

1. Deliver a housing pipeline for the city, ensuring that there is a wide range of housing built to a high quality and meets the aspirations of existing residents and those who want to move to Stoke-on-Trent
2. Progress delivery of approved Local Plan in accordance with refreshed timetable; and Priority Masterplans for the City centre (Hanley), Longton and Chatterley Whitfield
3. Continue to deliver the city regeneration strategy and programme, maximising the creation of employment opportunities and supporting the rebalancing of the housing offer
4. Ensure delivery of key transport infrastructure improvement projects to time, budget and quality
5. Develop long term plan for waste disposal facilities in the City
6. Facilitate heritage-led town centre regeneration by working with heritage partners and developers to invest in buildings, including pursuing delisting where appropriate.
7. Ensure delivery of a wider range of high-quality employment space, including continued development out of the Enterprise Zone.
8. Delivery of the capital programme for education, ensuring that there are sufficient school places for the city.
9. Develop a city-wide energy plan and District Heat Network with focus on use of renewables and delivery of affordable warmth
10. Improve connectivity within the city by continuing delivery of the Bus Service Improvement Plan

Main Improvement Projects

- Publish the draft Local Plan.
- Deliver the Transforming Cities Fund programme (Stoke and Longton stations and environs)
- Progress Residential Sites Disposal programme to house builders
- Deliver the Levelling Up Fund programme:
 - Goods Yard, Stoke
 - Etruscan Square, Hanley
 - Crown Works, Longton
 - Spode Works programme, Stoke
 - Tunstall Library and Baths,
- Deliver remediation of Burslem Market and safeguarding of Wedgwood Institute and develop plan for restoration of Queens Theatre.
- Deliver the Levelling Up Partnership across the City with Stoke FE College, Canal & River Trust, Port Vale FC and others.

- Deliver the agreed programme of physical improvements for Potteries Museum and Gallery
- Develop Chatterley Whitfield Masterplan and AI Growth proposal
- Deliver the High Street Accelerator programme (Stoke town centre)
- Deliver all projects associated with the Bus Service Improvement Programme, the EV programme and the
- Progress delivery of the Housing Pipeline comprising of over 4,800 new homes
- Progress the analysis and business case for Hanford 2.0 new waste disposal facility
- Produce Business Case and Funding bid(s) to regenerate China Halls building in Stoke town (£10m)
- Deliver the asset management programme of disposals and asset transfers.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments

- Maximise income from planning services (DM) activity.
- Increase council tax and business rates income from regeneration and housing development programme
- Implementation of the Planning Services IT system providing a better interface with the end user (residents and businesses) and more efficient processing of planning applications.
- Ensuring compliance with the new national Building Control requirements.
- Delivery of capital receipts from the disposal of sites for residential development and other assets.

Key Operational Measures

- Percentage of major planning applications determined within timescale.
- Percentage of minor planning applications determined within timescale.
- Number of (working) days turnaround for land charges applications.
- Percentage of planning appeals lost.
- Number of new homes and new commercial space delivered, broken down by tenure.
- Project Milestones as reported to Major Projects Board and Housing Pipeline Board

Main Risks

- Insufficient levels of grant funding to support Housing Pipeline
- Delays in delivery of schemes creating reputational damage and increasing scheme
- Slow progress in implementing new IT systems
- Changes in Government legislation
- Internal delays due to procurement and approval processes
- Insufficient workforce capacity and skills and recruitment problems

- Restrictions imposed on funding sources i.e. double subsidy, timeframe restrictions, programmes

8 – Economic Development, Culture and Heritage

Key Priorities

1. Develop a delivery/action plan for the Economic Development Strategy spanning business support, skills development, employment support, social enterprise, tourism, community asset development and inward investment.
2. Build up the employment support offer, including reducing the number of adults who are economically inactive due to long-term health problems.
3. Review household support (including MOTs and HSF7), childcare, and back-to-work programmes to ensure maximisation of their impact.
4. Roll out new grass-roots cultural programmes across our communities, working with the Arts Council and Stoke Creates.
5. Launch a Heritage Prospectus and create a clear plan for valued heritage assets, alongside the Heritage Development Trust, and a prioritised programme of restoration and re-use, including community asset transfer where appropriate.
6. Develop an approach to community wealth building including support for the development of community micro-enterprises, and community finance.
7. Support delivery of the Skills and Employment Framework to match skills with the future needs of employers and transition to new Skills and Growth Levy to enhance skills development across the City.
8. Develop an enhanced business support offer, including help for social enterprise and community micro-businesses and an “inward investment” offer to business wishing to move to or expand in the city.
9. Secure the necessary conditions for continued successful delivery of the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone (CVEZ) development
10. Develop the city’s museums offer to encourage more families in the city to experience culture and heritage.

Main Improvement Projects

- Support a city-wide collaborative approach to the provision of music and entertainment venues in the city to support the leisure, hospitality, and visitor economy.
- Develop and implement a Get Britain Working Local Plan in conjunction with the county council and other partners.
- Implement the actions following the commercial review of the Town Hall event spaces, including all health and safety requirements and recommendations, ensuring that maximum return is driven from the assets.
- Secure plans for future operation of The Regent Theatre and Victoria Hall, including market competition to improve the current offer in the Victoria Hall.
- Deliver the PMAG prospectus, focusing in 2025/26 on the PMAG Reimagined £5m capital improvements and the bid to the Heritage Lottery fund for renewal of the ground floor galleries.
- Evaluation of the impact of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund four-year programme.

- Undertake an assessment of the state of the ceramics sector in North Staffordshire and implement the findings as appropriate to ensure ongoing support for the sector.
- Continued support for the Food Partnership to provide sustainably food access across the city.
- Evaluation of the business enterprise centre/incubation space in the city and how it supports entrepreneurship and the development of new businesses in the SME sector.
- Develop an approach to engaging with businesses at a strategic level in line with the government's guidance to capture the "business voice" in policies and planning.
- Deliver heritage small grants programme and develop proposals for next stages of Living Heritage Trail.
- Support Stoke Creates in development of UNESCO Creative City bid and continue work on development of city as International Ceramics Centre.
- Development and roll out of the Connect to Work programme in line with Government requirements and in partnership with the county council.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments

- Partnering with the County Council on Economic Development initiatives, programmes and projects, such as the Growth Hub, LVEP, Investment, Skills and Employment, will strengthen overall resources and responsibilities in these areas and reduce operational overheads, through shared costs of software and systems.
- Increase business rates income through targeted programmes to increase sustainable business occupancy of new and existing properties.
- Identify new funding opportunities to support programmes relating to Economic Development, that also sustain the on-going cost of roles and functions that are delivered by the Economic Development Team.
- Maximise income by building commercial use of Town Hall spaces, this includes repeat business and attracting new business. Investment in the venue, will also attract a more diverse range of events, increase the value proposition for promoters, and increase income for council.
- Implement future arrangements and options for delivering and operating the Regent Theatre and Victoria Hall, to minimise major on-going costs (subsidy and building maintenance) incurred by the council.
- Maximise income through a programme of exhibitions, displays and events at PMAG and GPM.
- Support Ford Green Hall and Etruria Industrial Museum to become financially self-sustaining.
- Maximise access to external funding across council services by providing bid writing resources and coordination, focussing on heritage and community opportunities.

Key Operational Measures

- Performance of employment support programmes against target.
- Performance of the Staffs and Stoke-on-Trent Growth Hub.
- Inward investment.
- Visitor numbers.
- Number of heritage buildings safeguarded/improved.
- Apprenticeship numbers and use of levy.

Main Risks

- General failure to secure sustained government funding or commercial income/sponsorship, to support the delivery of important impactful economic development programmes, functions and activities that benefit communities and businesses in the city.
- Loss of Council funding means that external funding now must fully support all staff costs across the economic development service areas
- Impact of any future government policies, priorities and finances, in terms of Economic Development (e.g. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation and other national and international external influences and events) that could impact on the economy.
- Public access disruption to PMAG due to the major capital transformation project.
- Physical space/capacity for future provision of Archives and Museums collections. The restricted space provides some concern regarding future collecting.
- Failure to meet contractual expectations from funding bodies resulting in loss of contract and/or reputation damage.

9 – Citizenship and Governance

Key Priorities

1. Assisting residents in the exercise of their information rights including their rights to access information held by the Council
2. Facilitating the protection of personal data belonging to residents that is held by the Council and managing processes associated with data incidents to mitigate and remediate impacts
3. Providing accurate advice on decision-making processes to support compliance with legal and constitutional requirements and help to ensure that understanding and responsibility is embedded across all council functions.
4. Providing comprehensive support to elected members to ensure that they have appropriate access to information and resources, relevant training and development, tools to facilitate effective communication with residents and confidence in their personal safety whilst carrying out their council duties.
5. Promoting civic pride through the effective planning and management of all civic events and professional support for the Lord Mayoralty.
6. Supporting engagement programmes to increase participation in the electoral process and empower active citizenship through local democracy.
7. Produce a robust Annual Governance Statement which captures all key governance issues and improvements.
8. Ensure that all successful applicants for British or British Overseas Territories citizenship attend their citizenship ceremony within three months of being notified unless the Home Office grants an extension.
9. Support effective operation of the Coroner's Service, including provision of new courts and offices, and improvements to the city mortuary.
10. Deliver a successful City Centenary programme.

Main Improvement Projects

- Continue to review and develop working practises, guidance documents, handbooks and internal and external webpages support the provision of the right information at the right time.
- Provide training, support and advice to officers and councillors on the Constitution and the decision-making process.
- Support the further develop of improvements to the functionality of the Councillor Casework System and ensure that members are kept informed of key changes/updates.
- Implement the Ward Member Information Charter to support an agreed systematic way that officers communicate information to Ward Councillors as community leaders.
- Continue to support compliance with information governance requirements through regular training and a culture which encourages compliance and provides for the safe reporting of incidents.

- Continue to promote the use of All Member Briefings as an effective means of helping elected members to keep pace with key issues affecting the council and the city.
- Implement improved monitoring arrangements for the accurate management of Ward Budgets which includes a monthly reconciliation exercise.
- Facilitate opportunities for educational engagement in local democracy as another means of increasing awareness and understanding.
- Improvements to coroners service support and accommodation in partnership with county council.
- Co-ordinate the Annual Governance Statement with the Senior management team to ensure all governance issues and improvements are captured.
- Continue to embed the assurance process with senior officers to ensure that all governance concerns and issues are captured and feed into improvement plans.
- Coordinate the delivery of the Centenary programme.

Efficiency and Productivity Commitments

- Streamline the administration and management of the school admission appeals service through the implementation of the Capita One appeals module.
- Further develop and encourage elected member access to the on-line Learning Management System as another means of supporting learning and development.
- Continue to develop and support effective report management through the roll out and application of Modern.gov options.
- Encourage knowledge sharing and cross team collaboration to build resilient and effective services.
- Improve integration with Electoral Rolls to ensure that new citizens are made aware of their eligibility for voting.

Key Measures

- Percentage of Freedom of Information responses provided on time.
- Percentage Environmental Information Request responses provided on time.
- Electoral canvas rate.
- Registrations of births within the statutory timescale (42 days).
- Registrations of deaths within the statutory timescale (5 days).
- Percentage of Freedom of Information responses provided on time.
- Percentage Environmental Information Request responses provided on time.
- Member training completion rates.
- Number of casework enquiries responded to within 10 working days.
- Number of school admission appeals heard within the statutory timescales.
- Number of urgent decisions.
- Number of exempt reports
- Accuracy of governance documents – number of corrections or amendments required post publication.

- Number of reported data breaches

Main risks

- Risk of ultra vires decision making or non-compliance with regulations and statutory requirements.
- Weak decision-making processes leading to reputational damage and/or legal challenge.
- Cybersecurity threats to the elections system targeting electoral services and voter registration data.
- Time and capacity of small teams to deliver key priorities and meet peaks in demand on top of delivering business as usual activity.
- Failure to recruit and retain suitable officers to fill vacancies.
- Risk of release of confidential information, data breaches and non-compliance with GDPR requirements
- Inadequate business continuity planning leading to potential disruption of governance functions.
- Ineffective or oversight of officer decision making and lack of transparency or accessibility to decision making.
- Failure to maintain an adequate pool of volunteer independent panel members to support an effective school admission and appeals service.
- Staff time and capacity to be able to hold enough ceremonies, complete administration and schedule them within the required timeframe.

Enabling and Support Themes

A – Finance, Audit and Assurance

Key priorities

- Ensure the financial stability of the organisation by enabling the Council to set a realistic budget, optimising expenditure, maximising revenues and investing wisely.
- Deliver a rolling programme of change in line with corporate transformation priorities for finance and the wider city council.
- Ensure the integrity and credibility of financial procedures, processes, reports and systems to provide overall financial assurance.
- Deliver all financial monitoring and reporting for the Council including all financial statutory reports.
- Develop strategies to recruit, retain, train and develop a highly skilled, specialist workforce, stabilising capacity and capability, to ensure we have a robust and value-added service.
- Develop an updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy securing the financial resilience of the City Council
- Manage any in-year pressures through regular meetings and robust financial monitoring
- Continue training and induction programme for budget holders in effective financial stewardship
- Deliver accurate and timely financial information to support service delivery, business change and investment.
- Ensure the safety and compliance of the organisation through effective audit, assurance, governance and insurance arrangements.
- Maintain an effective risk management system and use the understanding of risks to inform decisions and resource allocation.

Main Improvement Projects

- Delivery of efficiency and productivity projects through the corporate transformation programme
- Delivery of Financial Management code improvement plan
- Delivery of Digital Payments project
- Implementation of ERP for Finance, HR and Payroll, with review of associated processes
- Development of Financial Transformation and Assurance model to support and complement the overall Transformation Programme
- Development of CRM programme, ensuring appropriate links with ERP and Corporate Digital Strategy.

- Establish and support a pipeline of change projects through the corporate transformation programme that will look to improve service delivery, ensure value for money and develop commercialisation.
- Improve the ledger data and categorisation of budgets and actual expenditure/income, in preparation for ERP transition
- Development of capital strategy. Continually review capital programme in the context of the financial pressures faced and ensure alignment with the capital strategy.
- Continue to undertake targeted review of financial controls and processes to ensure robust oversight of public money.
- Collaborate with external partners to explore potential cost-sharing or joint funding opportunities.
- Deliver a positive annual assurance opinion
- Continue to lead on the development of the Staffordshire Counter Fraud Partnership to raise awareness of fraud through training, communications and skills/knowledge development.
- Development of the council audit and risk management system to deliver effective and efficient risk-based assurance.
- Continued review of council's insurance arrangements and claims handling procedures.

Key Measures

- % audit / statutory accounts deadlines achieved
- % PLANS completed on time
- % Monitoring deadlines met
- % audit recommendations implemented by due date

Main Risks

- Challenges faced in the light of uncertain financial environment including demand, inflation and future funding impacts on the financial resilience of the City Council.
- Risks within the wider economy on service demands and delivery across the council.
- Financial pressures and capacity issues may limit or prevent implementation of planned activities or improvement projects.
- Challenges faced in terms of recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced staff.
- ERP implementation is a major project, impacting all areas of finance and the wider business. Any delays could result in financial impact.
- Lack of appropriately qualified staff to undertake key activities.

B – Workforce and Organisational Development

Key Priorities

1. Develop a fresh Workforce & OD Strategy – the Strategy needs to be updated to reflect the corporate strategy and key priorities of the Council. The strategy will focus on the workforce requirements to support the priorities and the strategy.
2. Delivery of a full Management Development Programme.
3. Delivery of improved recruitment and retention system, with focus on speeding up process of recruitment and onboarding.
4. Continued delivery of sickness absence improvement programme.
5. Implement the new ERP system – Once the system has been implemented it is essential to ensure the changes are embraced and all employees use the new system for all aspects of self service. This will ensure that processes are being followed, and data accuracy is improved across all areas such as absence management.
6. Renew and develop the Equality Strategy, including a fresh Action Plan.

Main Improvement Projects

- Absence Management – Reducing the absence rates across all directorates will have an impact on several areas. Supporting employee health and wellbeing, reducing overtime, reducing the need for agency spend.
- Overtime reduction.
- Recruitment and Retention – Improving retention will ensure that skills and talent are retained in the organisation. A focus on end-to-end recruitment processes will enable the Council to create an employer brand and improve recruitment processes which are not adding value and causing delays in filling roles. Improved recruitment processes and approaches will ensure that hard to fill roles are prioritised and will also improve the candidate experience and reach wider pools of candidates, improving the diversity of the workforce.
- Agency and Interims Spend project – Reducing agency spend can contribute to addressing the financial challenges of the Council as well as driving the right workforce planning processes.
- Delivery of a Management Development Programme – this will ensure that all managers of the Council are provided with core skills to help to drive the right culture across the organisation. It will also aim to equip managers with the right tools to deliver against their role requirements.
- Corporate induction, management induction and temporary staff.
- Learning and development, including increased use of e-learning and resetting of mandatory training requirements, introducing a more flexible approach that is responsive to service needs.
- SAP implementation and embedding new ways of working across the organisation.
- Employee engagement.

- Employee wellbeing.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy and action plan.

Key Measures

- Turnover and Retention
- Recruitment Timescales
- Payroll accuracy – Error management.
- Overtime levels and spend
- Agency Worker Spend.
- Percentage of PLANS completed.
- Sickness Absence
- Number of Grievances received and upheld for Bullying, Harassment or Discrimination.
- Percentage compliance for GDPR and Cyber Security Training – Linked to Mandatory Training.

Main Risks

- Restructure and implementation of new team – potential delays of new starters. Skills shortage within current team.
- ERP being delayed - The delay will impact the transformation of the HR processes.
- Management Development Training delay – the process has been delayed due to several issues with the Spec that was put together. There is now a more focused approach that will look to move this work forward.
- Recruitment of key personnel to the roles within the Recruitment Team.

C - Customer Services

Key Priorities

1. Provide an effective and efficient customer experience by offering accessible, convenient, and responsive customer services putting the customer in control of how and when they access support.
2. Adopt a 'digital first' Council wide approach to all forms of customer contact where appropriate using technology to enhance and improve the customer experience.
3. Provide a best-in-class complaints resolution service, developing a restorative practice approach.
4. Provide improved face-to-face access point for those who need it and further integration with the library service to provide a network of community access points.
5. Prioritise the library service as a vital asset for communities and inclusive of digital access, whilst expanding the service through the development of a volunteer programme.

Main Improvement Projects

- Develop and publish the combined Customer Service and Digital Strategy for the authority inclusive of AI and including integration with the library network for access and skills.
- Continue to adopt a Council wide digital first approach using digital platforms voice automation and AI where appropriate to both customers and services, across all services including those which are devolved from the main contact centre.
- Ensure improved access for the digitally excluded and our most vulnerable residents.
- Proactive promotion of all elements of digital services including electronic payments e.g. Direct Debits.
- To aid service transformation with the aim to enhance customer experience the out of hours call handling elements from Lifeline (ASC) will be transferred into the Corporate Customer Services Team, where a full review will take place to complement the City Council out of hours offer.
- Continue expansion of system automation and other e-solutions to improve the customer journey and introduce further efficiencies within the service.
- In line with ERP develop the business case and secure approval for delivery of a corporate CRM system.
- Expand voice automation and look to include AI opportunities for customer access.
- Continue to review resource to improve the customer service response time in specific areas, particularly housing repairs & maintenance.
- Continue to embed restorative practice methods to help resolve customer enquiries and disputes faster and more effectively to improve satisfaction levels and reduce complaints and escalation.

Key Measures

- All contact centre, inclusive of those devolved, average wait time and numbers of abandoned calls.
- Usage of e-forms and other digital channels (number of contacts).
- Number of library users against target.

Main Risks

- Financial pressures may limit or prevent implementation of planned activities or improvement projects.
- Resource pressures may impact on the delivery of projects and programmes of work.
- ICT resources could impact on the ability of Customer Services to provide a reliable and efficient service to the public.
- Lack of volunteers to support Library service aspirations.

D – Digital

Key Priorities

1. Provide reliable and secure information systems and digital services on a robust technology platform.
2. Support programmes to improve access for the digitally excluded.
3. Develop and implement the combined Customer Access & Digital Strategy
4. Improve the digital skills of both service users and employees.
5. Help the organisation to make better, data driven decisions through technology solutions.
6. Create a common digital platform enabling an improved customer experience.
7. Provide software solutions to enable a digital first approach.
8. Engage a strategic partner for digital transformation and AI to develop our strategy and delivery roadmap.
9. Simplify and rationalise software and ICT infrastructure.

Main Improvement Projects

- Implement SAP ERP.
- Fully implement the new Planning system.
- Explore alternative delivery models for the primary data centre.
- Consolidate corporate telephony platforms into Teams.
- Implement Capita One developments for all-age transport and other education priorities.
- Enable business intelligence through the further development of the data warehouse and implement tools for predictive analytics with Microsoft Fabric.
- Explore use case opportunities for AI and support appropriate pilots.
- Continue to develop and implement Silicon Stoke initiatives across Education, Health, and Business.
- Develop improvement project for council website as part of improved customer digital offer.
- Digitally transform more external facing services including payments, appointments, bookings and customer interactions
- Digitally transform more internal services, supporting employees to have the right tools and systems to be more efficient and effective.

Key Operational Measures

- Council network uptime.
- Percentage of council storage that is cloud-based.
- Training Compliance (%) - Cyber Security.
- Digital literacy levels - employees
- Channel shift – reduction in calls, visits
- % of back office or customer-facing processes automated

- Percentage of Council financial transactions that are cashless.
- Number of users of Council digital transaction services.
- Digital Inclusion – usage amongst target groups.

Main Risks

- Financial pressures may limit or prevent implementation of planned activities or improvement projects.
- Recruitment and retention of ICT specialists.
- Balancing “business as usual” with transformative work could reduce the ability to deliver projects or risk the integrity of the current infrastructure.
- A targeted or more generic cyber threat could destabilise the Council and divert ICT resource away for a long period of time.
- Deployment of AI is not co-ordinated, and ethical standards are not delivered.

E – Assets

Key Priorities

1. Commence and complete City-wide condition surveys and maintain an up-to-date asset management strategy, backed by a secure asset register based on forthcoming condition surveys and 20-year FMR.
2. Minimise the costs of our estate through best use of assets and reduced energy costs.
3. Support Estates team to maximise social value through the commissioning of property projects and property services.
4. Review Corporate Property Services to ensure fit for purpose, future-proofed services.
5. Deliver Operational Assets Improvement Programme.
6. Improve our cleaning and FM service delivery across the Corp property portfolio
7. Improve site contractor working to ensure SSOW and set to work procedures are adhered to.
8. Improve, support the transition of repairs and maintenance to help navigate improvement and change plans whilst maintaining BAU as a minimum.

Main Improvement Projects

- Undertake building conditions surveys across the retained corporate operational and commercial asset base, identify life-cycle costs.
- Review of construction and maintenance, procurement and supply chain. Set up and establish supply chain base for timely project delivery.
- Improve compliance updates from supply chain teams including completion ratios on previous year.
- Undertake RAAC and Radon surveys of the corporate and commercial asset base
- Undertake statutory risk assessments and surveys across commercial and operational assets to ensure statutory compliance.
- Development of performance measures for Corporate Property and delivery of repairs and maintenance services to non HRA.
- Develop a post PFI maintained schools property support offer.
- Deliver Operational Asset Group work stream projects – Swann House; Civic Centre 4th Floor refurbishment; Customer Contact; Locality Working; Emergency Response; Depots Improvements; Records Management.
- Delivery of City Mortuary improvements.

Key Measures

To be developed as follows:

- Target 100 per cent compliance completion on a seven-week lag to allow for paperwork and certification provision.
- Develop process maps and metrics to improve project lead ins including inter department dependencies (EG planning, legal, procurement) for all pre-mobilisation stages prior to go live.
- Monthly FM and Cleaning Audits to be carried out – underpinned with follow up of closed out timely actions
- Develop C-stat survey on key public buildings – EG SM 1 and 2.
- Commence and complete FRA programme, following supplier on boarding.
- Ensure up-to-date condition data
- Ensure all periodic rental reviews are completed to time.
- Maximise income collection and minimise bad debts
- Minimise void times for commercial assets.

Main Risks

- Staff recruitment, retention and capacity issues, quality of new team members will be critical to drive higher and maintainable standards.
- Significant capital (and potential) and expenditure following condition survey findings.
- Reputational damage – reduce long standing building / asset issues.
- Smooth transition of goods yard prior – awareness training.
- Maintain review processes for asbestos and prep team / supplier for any additional findings during surveys.

F - Data, Records, Performance and Analytics

Key Priorities

1. Empowering evidence-based decisions
 - a. Foster a culture where decisions at all levels are informed by high-quality data.
 - b. Use predictive analytics to anticipate challenges and proactively address them.
2. Improving data quality and consistency
 - a. Implement standards to ensure data is accurate, complete, and up to date.
 - b. Introduce tools and training to eliminate errors during data entry and reporting.
3. Enhancing collaboration and sharing
 - a. Break down barriers between departments by introducing unified systems and processes.
 - b. Encourage the use of shared dashboards and reports to promote transparency.
4. Driving innovation through technology
 - a. Adopt a cloud-first approach to enable greater agility, scalability, and security.
 - b. Leverage tools like Microsoft Azure and Power BI to modernise reporting and analytics.
5. Improve records management system
 - a. Ensure clarity of policies and procedures with respect to storage and retention
 - b. Implement a single repository for contracts
 - c. Enable long-term storage solution for remaining paper records
6. Building a skilled, data-confident workforce
 - a. Upskill staff with tailored training programmes in data literacy and modern tools.
 - b. Establish a “Centre of Excellence” to promote continuous learning and collaboration.

Main Improvement Projects

- Deliver initial set of Minimum Viable Products with support from a technical partner that provides immediate value and insights and an understanding of the costs of leveraging cloud services.
- Develop a comprehensive data literacy programme, tailored to different roles, from entry-level staff to senior leaders. This will empower staff to effectively utilise data, fostering a data driven culture and enhancing decision making capabilities across the council.
- Appoint Information Champions and Data Stewards to oversee data quality and ensure compliance with governance standards. This will promote accountability and consistency in data management practices.

- Establish Data Governance Framework (ownership policies and standards) to facilitate reliable and trustworthy data usage.
- Explore a range of use cases for the application of AI with support from a technical partner to drive innovation and efficiency in council operations.
- ASC Reporting Relaunch – Rebuilding of all performance and MI reports for the ASC directorate as part of the data quality improvement project. This will support better decision making and service delivery.
- Support the Family Matters Programme with reporting and analytics to track progress, measure impact and make data informed adjustments to better support families.
- Support the Strengthening Communities with reporting and analytics to identify community needs, monitor programme effectiveness and guide resource allocation to strengthen community resilience.
- Continue to develop the Making Great Places Power BI reporting suite to offer deeper insights and facilitating better planning and monitoring.
- Provision of analytical support to the Cost-of-Living Partnership and the Hardship Commission/Poverty Truth Commission. This will provide critical insights into the impact of economic challenges, informing interventions and policy decisions.
- Continuation of ‘Data Clinics’ initiative which identifies and implements solutions to data related issues to enhance operational efficiency.
- Development and implementation of a Records Management Strategy and Plan, including establishing the digital and physical contracts repository.

Key Measures

- Numbers of personal data breaches and Information Commissioner judgements

Main Risks

- Council IT & data teams may lack experience with cloud-native architectures
- Council IT & data teams lack capacity to implement the data strategy and MVPs
- The initial set of MVPs might not accurately reflect full-scale operational costs and challenges.
- Data literacy does not improve to the level required to embed a data driven culture
- Resource constraints of the IT and Performance team to support business as usual, key projects and the data strategy implementation.
- The renewal cost of power bi and fabric subscription could increase as consumption increases.
- Significant corporate failure due to weaknesses in records storage and recovery.
- Failure to achieve income generation target/loss of SLA posts reducing capacity within the performance team.

G – All Age Commissioning and Care Brokerage

Key priorities

1. Independence: Ensure that wherever possible commissioned services focus on enabling the citizens of Stoke-on-Trent to maintain their independence and access local services in their local communities and prevent the need for statutory interventions.
2. Housing: Maximising accommodation options to promote independence for older people and adults with learning disabilities, autism, physical disabilities and mental health, through strategic commissioning and a single delivery team across Adults Social Care and Housing.
3. Optimising Hospital Avoidance and Admissions: Work with NHS to implement an expanded step-up and step-down provision to reduce admissions and support timely discharges to home from the hospital.
4. Integrated Commissioning and Partnerships: Growing our local partnerships across the local system including the voluntary community faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) and Health, to ensure that there is a joined-up approach to maintaining independence in the community.
5. Workforce: Internal workforce development, recruitment and retention to build an effective commissioning function including strategic commissioning, contact management, quality assurance and improvement, and brokerage. As well as the development of strategies and plans to support local workforce, recruitment and retention within adult and children's social care markets.
6. Market Management and Oversight: Ensure that the City Council meets its statutory requirements in terms of commissioning, management and oversight of the care market
7. Coproduction: Embed a strong transformation and coproduction approach which ensures that the voice of people who use services, local communities, councillors, internal colleagues, external partners and providers are at the heart of everything that we do.

Main Improvement Projects

- Commissioning Operating Framework: Building on the development of the Commissioning Handbook, and Contracts and Commissioning Board, with further alignment with the Procurement Code, and Procurement Assurance Board.
- School Travel: Overhaul home to school travel, identifying efficiencies with a clear implementation plan.
- Innovative Care Solutions: Develop opportunities for local businesses to be created to run small micro-enterprises that support and care for other people and increase direct payment opportunities.

- SEN Placement Planning: The development of a Placement Planning and Strategic Commissioning approach to develop and improve SEN Market Management and oversight of the independent education sector.

Key Measures

- ASC - % of social care recipients on a personal budget/direct payment
- ASC - Adult Social Care: Satisfaction with services
- ASC - Number of unmet assessed hours (Home Care)
- ASC - Number of agreed home care hours
- ASC - Quality / CQC ratings of our Providers
- ASC - Number of individuals in Nursing Care
- ASC - Number of individuals in Residential Care
- ASC - Number of individuals in Supported Living
- ASC - Number of individuals in Extra Care
- CAFs - External Residential Placements
- CAFs - External Fostering Placements.

Main Risks

- Demand: Extensive waiting lists and increasing complexity and demand.
- Workforce: Recruitment and retention of staff within the external care market
- Funding context: Significant pressure on NHS budgets nationally and locally driving costs towards local authority
- Care Market Capacity: Reduction in 24-hour placements dependent on diverse market in supporting living and appropriate properties.
- Provider failure: challenging financial leading to hand-backs of care packages that diverts operational time and capacity.

H – Procurement and Commercial Services

Key Priorities

1. Full reassessment and revising of Procurement Code to ensure robust operating model and simplification of policy/associated processes.
2. Complete recruitment of suitable permanent workforce and ensure comprehensive training and development programme.
3. Reduction of waiver and exemption requests – initially by criteria revisions through Procurement Code.
4. Creation of new Grants Policy to clarify and simplify processes for grant funded projects.
5. Simplification of procurement assurance process and documentation.
6. Anchor Institutions – strengthening of relationships in support of community wealth building and shared commercial opportunities.
7. Full compliance with Procurement Act as various elements become mandated within 2025-26.
8. Properly and fully implement Category Management methodologies and behaviours.
9. Ensure that housing repairs activity is compliant and commercially robust once 'lift and shift' period comes to an end.
10. Adopt SAP and migrate towards fully integrated procurement systems and order approval flows.
11. Complete delivery and transition of Schools PFI programme and prepare for other PFI hand-back processes.
12. Continue review of commercial services to ensure that they are genuinely net revenue-generating.

Main Improvement Projects

- Creation of Grants Policy and full adoption into Procurement Code and commercial behaviours.
- Process redefinitions
- Develop strategies to recruit, retain, train and develop an appropriately skilled workforce, stabilising capacity and capability, to ensure we have a robust and value-added service.
- Workshop hosting with key anchor institutions to promote genuine opportunities for community wealth building.
- SAP/Ariba migration and implementation.
- Contracts Register Improvement Project (SAP readiness)
- Delivery of Schools PFI under the revised handback arrangements including procurement of Council part of the programme
- Deliver Cabinet decision on future of catering service.

Key Measures

- CBIT outstanding order/invoice cycle times
- Reduction in overall order and invoice volumes
- Reduction in non-value added 'PAB' discussions (i.e. retrospective activity, grant funded projects etc.)
- Marked improvement in forward planning of Procurement Activity – PAB schedules no longer reactionary.
- Improved relationships between Procurement and wider organisation. Evidenced by understanding of key upcoming spend areas and integration of team members in key meetings/forums.

Main Risks

- Reluctance to change Procurement policy/process to ensure this remains fit for purpose and aligns with best practice.
- The failure of markets, supply chains or major suppliers adversely affects or prevents the Authority from continuing to deliver its services within budget.
- Inflation: The ability of the Authority to deliver services and projects will be adversely affected by inflationary pressures on supplies.
- Challenges faced in terms of recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced staff.
- Failure to adopt a strategic sourcing and contracts solution fully integrated with the ERP to maximise efficiencies, compliance and spend control.
- Failure to follow the category management approach and truly integrate with key areas of the council.
- Failure to use approved commercial mechanisms, resulting in maverick spend.
- Failure to plan – specifically not acknowledging contract end dates in good time leaving limited time to act in best commercial interests.
- Marketplace does not consider Stoke-on-Trent City Council a customer of choice, limiting the Council's ability to drive best value.

I – Strategy and Communications

Key Priorities

1. Promote the activities of the council and city in line with our strategic priorities
2. Oversee preparations of case for local government reorganisation and devolution to meet Government deadlines.
3. Act as effective stewards of the Future 100 partnership plan and programme.
4. Constantly – and significantly – increase the number of people who see and respond positively to our communications
5. Plan and deliver effective communications campaigns, with clear targets in terms of media impact and (where appropriate) behavioural change
6. Deliver effective stakeholder relations and external communications to ensure effective amplification of messaging, and that the message is delivered in the right way, by the right people
7. Ensure an efficient and effective reactive communications function, including pre-approved lines-to-take on key issues, which always promotes key strategic priorities
8. Diversify our social media presence, making better use of different channels to reach different audiences
9. Develop the corporate website as a more effective communications portal – for many people it is the “front door” to everything the council does, and is
10. Act as custodian of the strategy and policy framework, delivering key “pillar” documents including the Corporate Plan, Operational Plan and Teams Plans.
11. Improve our use of data to measure performance, drive improvement, understand our audiences and reach them in the places they consume information.

Main Improvement Projects

- Brand review: expanding our core brand, refreshing its visual identity and making it more focused on the city rather than the council as a corporate entity. Designing templates to achieve this and embedding this approach into future campaigns and services.
- Metrics: building on our existing digital reporting and analysis and in particular a) sharing directorate-specific insight reports with directors and cabinet members, b) embedding a culture of data-driven learning and improvement – making sure we are learning the right lessons from the metrics and applying them in our work going forward.
- Revising our approach to communications strategies to make them more focused and evidence based. Producing a new template for strategies which shorter, sharper, and build around a) a data-led assessment of audience and channels, b) clear key messages linked to clear strategic goals; c) genuinely useful measurable KPIs (rather than numbers for numbers’ sake).

- Embedding the tactical communications grid: taking it beyond the comms team/leader/CEO and opening it up to directors, senior managers and cabinet members as the key tactical planning document for external and internal comms.
- Linking internal communications more closely with the transformation function and improving the focus on change management. Implement the new Internal Communications strategy to deliver more effective and focused internal comms.
- Improve approaches to stakeholder engagement and management to deliver more proactive and better targeted communications and make better use of trusted advocates to support key policy initiatives. This should work towards development of an effective external affairs function.

Key Measures

- Digital metrics: total impressions across corporate digital channels (benchmark of 1m per month). social media follower growth across corporate digital channels (with a benchmark of for 10% growth per quarter overall and 20% in target channels); positive sentiment across corporate digital channels (measured in likes per 10,000 views, with a benchmark of 20 likes per 10,000 views).
- Numbers of positive and proactive stories – promoting key strategic objectives - issued to the media each week, picked up and used by at least one major media outlet
- Quarterly satisfaction surveys with directorates – how well is the service communicating strategic goals through external media and our own channels?
- Annual staff surveys – how well do people understand the strategies and priorities of the council, and how these relate to their roles and responsibilities?

Main Risks

- Disruption to core team through illness, staff leaving, etc. This is a small team covering a very wide range of corporate areas and communications disciplines.
- Unplanned events, emergencies etc disrupting our core corporate mission.
- Financial uncertainty. Communications are funded through several different streams, some of which are time limited. This makes long-term planning difficult
- Failure to adapt to rapidly changing media and communications environment, including the long-term structural decline of the local press, changing consumption habits, widely different consumption behaviour among different demographic groups, and the volatile nature of social media.
- Excessive demand for communications outstripping our ability to produce effective, high-quality, targeted output.
- Changing Government policy expectations with respect to local government organisation and devolution
- Complexity of propagating the Future 100 plans because of the difficulty that Whitehall faces in working across departments to partner a local growth plan.