

## **FINANCE, ASSETS & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 27th March, 2025  
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Mark Holland (Chair)		
Councillors:	Bryan J Tagg	Bettley-Smith Stubbs	Lawley Grocott
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Parker, P Waring, Allport and Lewis		
Substitutes:	Councillor Nicholas Crisp Councillor Rupert Adcock Councillor Ruth Wright (In place of Councillor Rebekah Lewis)		
Officers:	Sarah Wilkes  Simon McEneny	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer Deputy Chief Executive	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Stephen Sweeney	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - Finance, Town Centres and Growth	

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were shared as listed above.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

### **3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Chair recalled that information was to be circulated by the Service Director for Strategy, People & Performance further to the previous meeting.

Members confirmed that this had been received.

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2025 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

[Watch the debate here](#)

### **4. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW REPORT - THIRD QUARTER 2024/25**

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the performance of individual council services and progress made against priorities alongside financial information.

The Chair went through the performance indicators marked in red.

Food business inspections completed on time

The Deputy Leader commented that while the late inspections within quarter 2 had affected the yearly figure, recent inspections were completed on time which increased overall percentage and meant the target should be met by the end of the financial year.

Cllr Stubbs asked if this meant the shortfall would be recuperated.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) confirmed this was likely to be the case.

Stage 1 complaints processed in time being 20 working days

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that staff training along with review of policies were undertaken to ensure targets were met.

Cllr Bryan asked for clarification on the reviewing of policies and if this meant the processing period would be extended.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) responded that policies were to ensure that very clear procedures were in place right from the start so that complainants knew what to expect in terms of timescales. There were no intentions to increase the period over 20 working days.

The Chair commented that targets were set at corporate level and that the policy was to work towards them and not the other way around although they were open to being reviewed in light of other corporate targets or changes. It was within the remit of the Committee to make suggestions to Cabinet.

Cllr Stubbs wondered if the target was realistic and highlighted the negative trend suggesting the situation was getting worse.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that while the trend was negative the target felt appropriate and the team was working on re-adjusting the response time which varied with the complexity of complaints.

Cllr Stubbs echoed the Chair comment on the need to work towards the targets.

Staff turnover

The Deputy Leader commented that a number of fixed term contracts and retirements explained the figures.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) added that there had been an improvement and the indicator should be amber for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. The target was also under review and would be split up going forward to take into account people who retired, had been dismissed or left for other employment.

Cllr Stubbs welcomed the intention for the indicator to be split in two.

Digital online transactions

The Deputy Leader commented that a reduction of online transactions was not a bad thing in itself as it could be reflecting that issues were more efficiently sorted with no need to engage into digital transactions.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) added that the figures would also fluctuate depending on the season.

Cllr Adcock asked if the digital transactions included forms in relation to nuisances such as Walleys Quarry's odours.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) confirmed that was the case.

Cllr Bryan asked if the transactions included all online communications.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) confirmed that was the case.

Cllr Stubbs wondered if the target shouldn't be better phrased going forward.

Cllr Bryan also wished for a clarification of the target.

The Chair suggested it may be more to do with IT performance.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the initial intention was to encourage digital communications as opposed to phone calls or in person queries and facilitate things for residents.

An update would be provided at the next meeting.

Cllr Lawley wondered if it was possible to get some demographics.

The Deputy Chief Executive said this would depend on the transactions but limited personal information was required for matters such as bin collections – the use of personal data being subject to regulations.

The Chair asked if Cllr Lawley was referring to digital exclusions.

Cllr Lawley suggested a group of residents may be missed.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) reiterated that the Council had to be cautious about collecting and holding personal data. Information about residents was gathered when creating an online account and used to provide tailored services.

Cllr Stubbs wondered if data could be captured to undertake a broad sweep across the borough and deliver better services.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that legislation around digital information was evolving fast especially since the pandemic and the Council was constantly looking at how to improve services for residents with the support of the IT team.

The Deputy Chief Executive asked Cllr Stubbs what he meant by undertaking a broad sweep across the borough.

## ***Finance, Assets & Performance Scrutiny Committee - 27/03/25***

Cllr Stubbs clarified that this could be by age, gender, economic social background, or any data the Council may have.

The Chair said this could be considered and taken back to the next meeting.

Cllr Bryan asked if the Service Director for Information & Technology could be invited to the Committee to answer questions from members.

The Chair offered to investigate who would be the most appropriate officers and pass on the invitation.

The Deputy Chief Executive added that other officers may be more able to answer specific questions such as the Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance.

### Complainants informed within the required timescales of actions to be taken in relation to alleged breaches of planning control

The Deputy Leader commented that the complexity of issues explained the figures. Things were overall getting better but it was a lengthy process.

The Chair added that low figures may be reflecting a low level of complaints.

Cllr Grocott wondered if too much pressure wasn't put on officers.

The Chair checked with the Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) and advised that those timescales were not statutory and therefore it may be a worthy point to raise.

Cllr Stubbs supported Cllr Grocott's comment and suggested that if that was the case the targets may be counterproductive.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the Planning team was under resourced at the same time the previous year and that it had since then be remedied although there was a remaining training issue. While it was a slow process the situation was improving towards reaching the target which felt appropriate.

Cllr Lawley asked if the issues had to be dealt with before informing the complainants.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that a course of actions had to be decided before going back to the persons, which was more than simply acknowledging that the complaint had been received.

Cllr Bryan asked if a response was sent when this was taking longer than originally planned to manage expectations.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that complainants were being informed when the response was taking longer than expected.

### People accessing the museum's collections in person

The Deputy Leader said the target was changed the previous year with the 850 anniversary and may need to be looked at again.

Jubilee 2 customer satisfaction net promotor score

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that this was a national indicator involving 10 to 15 different areas that were looked at. The questions in the satisfaction survey were changing from one year to another meaning new issues were presented from the ones resolved the year before. A simplification of the process was under discussion.

The Deputy Chief Executive added that Sports England was running the indicator and the scores were down all across the country as a result of the change in criteria.

Cllr Stubbs commented that while the target seemed to be set up to fail, the Council was still behind national average.

**Resolved:** That the contents of the report and appendices be noted and that the Council's service and financial performance for this period continue to be monitored and challenged by the Committee.

[Watch the debate here](#)

**5. TOWN DEAL AND FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDS UPDATE**

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth presented the update on progress made in relation to the delivery of projects funded or part funded through Newcastle and Kidsgrove Town Deals, and the Future High Street Funds.

The Chair reminded members of the Planning Committee of the obligation to exercise care and not to determine any outcomes pertaining to ongoing planning applications.

Cllr Bryan reported having tried the new car park and being satisfied with it.

The Deputy Leader welcomed the endorsement.

The Deputy Chief Executive commented that the car park had been shortlisted for a construction excellence award.

The Chair added that it was a necessary upgrade.

Cllr Stubbs pointed out the car park remaining teething problems which shouldn't be ignored and welcomed the completion of the Bradwell element for Kidsgrove Town Deal. About the train station, it felt difficult to get minutes out of the Town Deal board and Cllr Stubbs wondered how the cost of the survey and subsequent remedial works would be covered.

The Deputy Leader noted that the local MP was sitting on the board and may be able to assist in providing answers.

The Deputy Chief Executive said the survey had been requested by Network Rail and was required before any works could be carried out. The price for the survey was known and approval from the board was awaited so that this could be undertaken. There were risks in relation to what the survey would find and no further action could be taken until that step was completed. The Council had initially been told that the survey wouldn't be required and the train station project had been budgeted on that

assumption. The situation had now changed and the costs involved in any remedial works were unknown. Information about the HS2 funds supposed to be allocated to the project through the County Council was also awaited, the Borough Council being on a list would those funds indeed become available. There were finally new objections at the Town Deal board about the decision to allocate the funds to the train station as originally agreed would the works end up being within the original budget, which was what was delaying the approval of the survey. Minutes would be passed on to members who wished to read them.

Cllr Stubbs commented having been in touch with Dave Williams MP who was trying to get things moving and expressed his dismay at the thought that the board was arguing about whether or not the train station was a priority, suggesting organisations may be putting their interest before that of residents.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that it wasn't just organisations challenging the allocation of the funds as the minutes would show and that the survey would need to be done before taking the discussion to the next level, including looking for additional sources of funding.

Cllr Stubbs asked about the Shared Service Hub's revised scope and the suggestion that this would be spread across different buildings.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that there were discussions at the Town Deal Board about the re-allocation of the funds and the Chief Executive of Three Spires had presented a robust plan which was currently being considered.

Cllr Stubbs reported having requested information about the new plan from Three Spires and told this couldn't be shared. He was intending to challenge this and copy in the Deputy Chief Executive.

Cllr Stubbs asked about the smaller building on Station Meadows.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council wasn't buying the garage anymore and that Kidsgrove Town Council would not be relocating outside of their existing facility. Three to four of the enterprise units that would be provided would be for business and economic growth in the area.

The Chair commented that it was within the Committee remit to scrutinise what the Council was doing and while what other organisations were doing may fall out of that scope the Town Deal Board and partners in the project could be invited to speak to members. The Council's administration and representatives were acting in alignment with what had been agreed and working on delivering what had been promised to both the Government who provided the funds and the residents of Kidsgrove.

Cllr Grocott enquired about project delivery timescales extensions and the situation with regard to Knutton Village Hall.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that an additional 12 months had been obtained from the Government and the Council had now until March 2027 to deliver projects. One group had expressed an interest in running the village hall and a meeting was scheduled to discuss the matter. Planning permission had been obtained and two things were now required, having the group incorporated as a CIC (Community Interest Company) and reaching an agreement about the lease.

**Resolved:** That the report on the delivery of the Town Deal and Future High Street Funds projects be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

**6. COMMERCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder / Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the updated Commercial Strategy and progress made to date on the various schemes, bringing the Committee's attention to the One Commercial Council coming up with interesting ideas having been proposed by members of staff currently in the make-up stage.

**Resolved:** That the updated Commercial Strategy and progress to date be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

**7. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair advised that the Vice-Chair and himself would discuss with officers about any upcoming meetings of interest in relation to digitalisation and the number of forms filled on the website.

**Resolved:** That the work programme be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

**8. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions received from members of the public.

**9. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:** That the next meeting be held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

**Councillor Mark Holland  
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.12 pm