

FINANCE, ASSETS & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 26th June, 2025
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present:	Councillor Mark Holland (Chair)		
Councillors:	Bryan Parker Turnock	P Waring Stubbs Grocott	Dean
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Bettley-Smith, Allport and Lawley		
Substitutes:	Deputy Mayor. Councillor Joan Whieldon (In place of Mayor - Councillor Robert Bettley-Smith)		
Officers:	Sarah Wilkes Simon McEneny Vanessa Higgins	Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer Deputy Chief Executive Policy and Strategy Business Manager	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Stephen Sweeney	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder - Finance, Town Centres and Growth	

1. APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed the new members to the Committee and shared apologies received as stated above.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Cllr Stubbs asked if there were any updates in relation to capturing data throughout the borough to improve Council's services as per his enquiry at the bottom of page 3 and top of page 4 of the agenda pack.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that this was work in progress.

The Chair added that, on a separate note, the Service Director for IT would be visiting the Committee later in the year to answer members' questions about digitalization.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th March 2025 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

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4. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW REPORT - FOURTH QUARTER 2024/25

The Chair informed new members that the Committee would typically be going through the Performance indicators in red but they were welcome to ask questions about any indicators.

The Deputy Leader introduced the report.

Cllr Stubbs wished to thank the author of the report for flagging the Kidsgrove Town Deal as amber. The specifics would be discussed in the next item.

The Chair moved on to the indicators themselves.

Food business inspections completed on time - ID1.2

The Deputy Leader advised that the Quarter 2 drop was due to staff absence and the person had now been replaced.

Stage 1 complaints processed in time being 20 working days - ID1.16

The Deputy Leader commented that what was lost earlier in the year was being recovered.

Percentage of Council Tax collected - ID1.11

The Deputy Leader said that the figure had caught up to 97.4% further to people paying out later which he felt was reasonable.

Cllr Waring asked for clarification that the target was for the whole of the year, not just the end of March.

The Deputy Leader responded that the figure related to the year ending at the end of March however work had been done since then to catch up.

Cllr Stubbs suggested that this meant this was taken off the following year's figure and asked if the Council had responded to the current government review on Council tax, as well as which effects were to be expected regarding the collection rates.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that the consultation was still open and the team was working on drafting a response. In relation to the collection rates, many variables were at stake that could impact people's circumstances and make them likely to e.g. pay or not pay. It was thought that the changes were not likely to massively impact the collection rates however the Council would monitor any effects as well as the results of the consultation and adjust the target as required for the following year.

Cllr Whieldon asked if Cllr Stubbs could elaborate on how, why and when the changes would impact residents of the borough.

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Cllr Stubbs said that the rules on Council tax collection and recovery of debt were very strict compared to, for example, the process a business would have to go through to get their money back for unpaid invoices, ten times longer. The consultation seemed to be looking into relaxing those rules which may lead to abuses.

The Policy and Strategy Business Manager advised that as more and more information and guidance were being put on the website, the need for people to fill in a form to ask a question had reduced. Examples for which residents would previously submit an enquiry included the definition of a tidy allotment garden and the conditions required to make a noise complaint.

Materials collected for recycling and composting verified via WDF - ID1.4a

The Deputy Leader commented that despite the slight dip the Council remained one of the most performant authorities in Staffordshire and well above the 44% national recycling rate with flexible plastic and film being now recycled along with cartons.

Cllr Waring added that manufacturers were also trying to reduce the amount of packaging leading to less material needing to be recycled.

Cllr Stubbs wondered if the current charge on garden waste may not discourage some family to recycle.

Car parking usage - Number of tickets purchased - ID4.1

The Deputy Leader advised that the car parking usage was current fluctuating with all ongoing works in the town centre.

The Deputy Chief Executive said that less visitors meant less car parking tickets being sold, the town centre footfall being also below target.

Cllr Stubbs asked about potential changes to the targets to be more relevant to the actual situation.

The Deputy Leader responded that the high targets had been set for the previous year and some may not be achievable, which the team was looking into.

The Policy and Strategy Business Manager advised that there was a business planning process for priority delivery plans. Service directors reviewed performance and a value for money exercise was being undertaken. The targets were then discussed with the Leadership team and Cabinet.

Cllr Stubbs suggested that the Committee could be involved in scrutinizing changes in performance targets going forward before the start of the financial year – clarifying that he did not mean for the Committee to set the targets themselves.

Cllr Waring commented that the targets should remain consistent year to year to give an accurate picture. The numbers were not necessarily relevant in themselves but the trends were.

Cllr Parker asked if the car parking space allocated to J2 membership could be extended to other car parking areas.

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The Deputy Leader said the suggestion would be passed on and discussed with the Leader.

Cllr Parker enquired about staff absences which he could not find in the report.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) responded this was under ID1.13 and ID1.14.

The Chair added that both indicators had recovered, and a positive yearly trend had been recorded.

Resolved: That the contents of the report and appendices be noted, and that the Committee continue to monitor and challenge the Council's service and financial performance for this period.

[Watch the debate here](#)

5. TOWN DEAL AND FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDS UPDATE

The Deputy Leader introduced the report on the schemes delivered through the Town Deal and Future High Street Funds as presented at the latest Economy & Place Scrutiny Committee meeting. Most of the projects were expected to be completed by October.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Shared Service Hub scheme was no longer being developed as a stand alone scheme and the money would now be allocated to four new projects as agreed by the Town Deal Board.

The improvements planned around the train station which were reliant on a survey being carried out and potential remedial works for which an additional budget might have been required had also been suspended and the Town Deal Board had agreed to use the funds for works outside of the underpinning zone only i.e. existing building and access to the train and car parking at the front. A proposal was awaited from the train operator.

The Chair welcomed the update and news that the Town Deal plans had not been scrapped contrary to what had been suggested in the press but were evolving to meet what was actually doable with a proper attitude to risks.

Cllr Whieldon enquired about digital communication in relation to clarifying the situation for residents and dispelling misinformation.

The Deputy Leader commented that it was difficult to change people's mind through social media but pictures of the developments would be put on the official communication channels, like the screen displayed in the town centre, so they could see for themselves.

The Deputy Chief Executive warned against the risks of getting into arguments on social media which officers could not respond to.

Cllr Waring added that one should be wary of communicating on matters that hadn't been publicised yet not to expose the Council to rumours and criticism.

The Chair stated that the attitude of the administration and members of Cabinet had been positive and of a huge benefit. Residents asking questions about what was true and what wasn't were getting straight answers.

Cllr Waring commented that while the projects may have changed, they should still meet the same criteria and provide the same ultimate benefits that were agreed when the funds were granted.

The Chair supported the statement, and the Deputy Leader expressed his enthusiasm for upcoming projects scheduled in the town centre.

Cllr Stubbs recalled previous discussions that took place on social media and suggested it may be sometimes appropriate to react when incorrect information was circulated. It was felt that Kidsgrove Shared Service Hub project as included in the original application and needed by residents could not be directly replaced by the four new schemes proposed and an explanation on how the original intentions would be met may be helpful for residents.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the Shared Service Hub project could not be delivered due to changes in circumstances and withdrawal of stakeholders. While it was a loss for the borough, the four new projects were based on needs identified through the original consultation process with residents and would deliver the outputs agreed in the Town Investment Plan.

Cllr Stubbs shared his disappointment at not seeing any contingency for what would have been a generational change at Kidsgrove train station.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council had investigated the fact there may be coal mining under the station however back then it was not a problem for the owners Network Rail who subsequently changed their approach to the risk. Funding was also expected from the Government in relation to the HS2 project which was supposed to be reallocated into a Local Transport Fund. No money was ever received and the Council had to look into yet another funding option from the Government which also ended up not being available. The plan was therefore now to use the money available to refurbish the train station, making it more attractive, safer looking and a pleasant environment for residents and visitors.

Cllr Stubbs asked what would be done with the remaining funds that would have gone into the originally scheduled works.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that proposals from East Midlands Railway were currently awaited about how to maximize the spend and impacts of the project. Any money left would be for the Town Deal Board to reconsider what may come as a plan B as done with the Shared Service Hub.

Cllr Waring added that information shared earlier in the year suggested that the survey at Kidsgrove Train Station would have gone ahead if it wasn't for the government moving its position. About the Shared Service Hub the money was now going towards projects that should fulfil most aspects of the original plans in relation to mental health, adult education etc.

Cllr Stubbs expressed concerns about the fact that East Midlands Railway had been given what looked like a cost envelope and wondered about what sort of proposal would come out.

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The Deputy Chief Executive advised that this was a budget envelope and all aspects of the proposal would have to be justified and go through an economic assessment and value for money exercise.

The Chair concluded that the session brought serious scrutiny of the Town Deal schemes. It felt that it was outside of the Council's power to have changed anything to the fact that two of the Kidsgrove projects couldn't be delivered and more to do with the partners involved.

The Chair also recalled that an organization was still required for the Knutton Village Hall scheme to go ahead and asked if any progress had been made.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that Support Staffordshire was talking to a group led by Cllr Grocott looking to create a Community Interest Company to take it on involving a formulation process.

Cllr Grocott commented that he would advise the Committee of any updates on the matter and took the opportunity to congratulate the team on the works completed in Chesterton for which he hoped to see pictures included in the report at the next meeting.

The Chair seconded the request.

Cllr Stubbs declared an interest as board member of VAST with whom a partnership with Support Staffordshire was being considered. He also said that Support Staffordshire may not be covering matters pertaining to the borough in the future and asked if this would have an impact on the project.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that Support Staffordshire was facilitating the discussions to create the group on which the emphasis would be and the timescale in relation to its amalgamation was irrelevant.

The Deputy Leader wished to conclude by sharing his satisfaction at the way things had been handled in both Chatterley Valley and Kidsgrove. The processes involved in the development of schemes were to be accepted as fluid and taking into account changes in circumstances.

The Chair reiterated that good scrutiny had been carried out by the Committee.

Resolved: That the report on the delivery of the Town Deal and Future High Street Funds projects be noted and pictures of the works completed in Chesterton be shared at the next meeting.

[Watch the debate here](#)

6. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair presented the work programme.

Resolved: That the work programme be noted.

[Watch the debate here](#)

7. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions received from members of the public.

8. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: That the next meeting be held on 4th September 2025.

**Councillor Mark Holland
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.22 pm