

FINANCE, ASSETS & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 4th September, 2025
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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Present:	Councillor Mark Holland (Chair)		
Councillors:	Bryan Turnock P Waring	Stubbs Allport Grocott	Dean
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Parker, Bettley-Smith and Lawley		
Substitutes:	Deputy Mayor. Councillor Joan Whieldon Deputy Mayoress. Councillor Susan Beeston		
Officers:	Roger Tait Sarah Wilkes Simon McEneny Georgina Evans- Stadward Craig Turner	Service Director - Neighbourhood Delivery Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer Deputy Chief Executive Service Director - Strategy, People and Performance Finance Manager / Deputy S151 Officer	
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

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th June 2025 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/27 TO 2030/31

The Deputy Leader introduced the Medium Term Financial Strategy including the financial pressures facing the Council for the period 2026/27 to 2030/31.

Cllr Stubbs asked what the money put aside for the Local Government Reorganisation was going to be spent on and how much of the Central Government related funding had been received.

The Finance Director (S151 Officer) advised that the money was going to be used on consultancy in respect of data gathering and producing the business case for Central Government at the end of November, as well as supporting staff and providing for any training needs they may require in the next couple of years prior to the new organisation taking over.

She also advised that the Council would be receiving 1/10 of the funding provided to Staffordshire from Central Government.

- Resolved:**
1. That the funding pressures of £1.777m in 2026/27 and £3.069m over the 5-year period covered by the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) be noted.
 2. That the approach regarding the development of savings and income generation proposals in the medium-term be noted.
 3. That the continued uncertainty regarding the medium-term impact of local government funding be noted.
 4. That the letter sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Appendix B) from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth requesting further funding in respect of Temporary Accommodation, be noted.

5. NUL QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVISIONS 2025/28

The Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance introduced the Quarterly Performance Revisions for 2025-28 and invited members to ask questions as she went through the sections.

Cllr Stubbs asked what metrics would be used instead of the number of unique users to the website and why the latter had been removed as performance indicator given the importance of reviewing and recording progress as the Council was moving towards more digital services.

The Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance responded that what would be measured was people interacting with the Council / engaging in an actual digital transaction as opposed to visitors who could have come there just clicking on a link with no intention to visit the site or bots.

Cllr Stubbs challenged the change in respect of J2 'Net Promotor Score' Performance Indicator and asked why the Council was moving away from the national benchmark.

The Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance advised that not being able to rely on and understand the figures due to the fluctuations in requirements from one year to another made it difficult to use them. The goal was to make performance accessible and understandable and the balance of that simplicity outweighed that of benchmarking.

Cllr Whieldon wondered if Cllr Stubbs suggestion that the Council was marking their homework could not be rephrased as setting targets they wish to achieve.

The Chair clarified that the administration was doing their homework and the Scrutiny Committee was marking it using metrics they could understand.

Cllr Stubbs asked for confirmation that the Waste Deposit Return Scheme would happen by 2027-28 as scheduled.

The Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance responded that this is what was currently anticipated and would be re-evaluated next year.

Cllr Stubbs requested that a response be provided at the next meeting and included in the next Cabinet Financial and Performance Monitoring Report.

The Chair acknowledged the request.

Cllr Bryan asked for an update on the implementation of the new CRM system.

The Service Director for Neighbourhood Delivery advised that he would submit the question to the Service Director for Information and Technology.

The Chair recalled that the latter was due to attend a meeting of the Committee and could provide a response then.

The Deputy Leader added that the Service Director for Information and Technology was currently on leave which is why he hadn't been able to join the present meeting.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

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6. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW REPORT - FIRST QUARTER 2025/26

The Chair introduced the Financial and Performance Review report, welcoming the addition of a purple trend for off target indicators.

The Chair invited portfolio holders and members to comment on red indicators.

Total number of online digital transactions

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder and Finance, Town Centres and Growth said that as discussed at previous meetings the figures were neither good or bad and indicated that more people were getting the information they were after without engaging into a digital transaction.

The Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance commented that those performance indicators needed to be used in conjunction with others.

The Chair added that the number of calls offered into the Customer Hub seemed to confirm that customers were receiving responses to their questions in other ways.

Total % of materials collected for recycling and composting verified via WDF

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder and Finance, Town Centres and Growth commented that the Summer had been drier than the previous year, resulting in less grass cutting and therefore less garden waste being produced.

Number of working days from occupational health referral to completion of works for stairlifts provided by a DFG

The Chair enquired about this purple indicator.

The Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance advised that this related to the disabled facilities grant as opposed to internal staff occupational health.

- Resolved:**
1. 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.
 2. That the movement in reserves under section 7 of the Finance Appendix A (£100k to the Planning Appeals Reserve, £150k to the Local Plan Support Fund and £150k to the Budget and Borrowing Support, be approved.

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7. COMMERCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the Commercial Strategy Update.

Cllr Stubbs asked for clarification that the Zanzibar site would feature both commercial and residential units as originally suggested.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that was the case.

The Chair added that the commercial end had already been through the planning process and the residential elements were now being considered.

- Resolved:** That the continuation of the current Commercial Strategy be supported, minor updates approved and progress to date on key projects noted.

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8. CIVIC PRIDE (EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES) STRATEGY 2025/28

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the draft Civic Pride (Empowering Our Communities) Strategy 2025-28 aiming to create a strong sense of belonging to and pride in the borough. The Strategy was coming in response to feedback from residents and as a call to arms for people of all ages to get involved.

The Service Director for Neighbourhood Delivery outlined the Strategy and details of the consultation and adoption process.

Cllr Grocott asked if the communication around the Civic Pride Strategy could be improved and more information sent out to residents and organisations such as schools and community centres.

The Service Director for Neighbourhood Delivery advised that the project was still in its infancy and events had been taking place to try and get this engagement started.

Going forward once the Strategy would be formally adopted and delivered there would be more opportunities for communities and groups to be involved as the goal was indeed for them to take ownership.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and shared his satisfaction over the launching events that took place in Westland and Clayton, which he attended with the Deputy Leader.

Resolved: That the draft Civic Pride (Empowering Our Communities) Strategy 2025 – 28 be considered and feedback in advance of adoption be provided.

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9. TOWN DEAL AND FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDS UPDATE

The Deputy Leader went through the Town Deal and Future High Street Fund Update report noting that most projects had now been delivered or were on their way to be completed.

Cllr Grocott reiterated his request from the previous meeting that photos of the new houses in Chesterton be put in the next update report.

The Chair seconded the request.

Cllr Waring noted that the works had started at Kidsgrove including the refurbishment of the toilets which was welcomed.

Cllr Whieldon commended everyone involved in the delivery of projects.

Cllr Waring shared that a consultation would take place on 18th October between 11am and 2pm in the former Brown's Garage.

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.

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10. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair advised that the date of the meeting featuring a Q&A session with the Service Director for Information and Technology would be confirmed.

Resolved: That the work programme be noted.

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11. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The following question had been received from a member of the public and was read out by the Deputy Leader:

"Commercial Strategy Update

Finance, Assets & Performance Scrutiny Committee - 04/09/25

Energy costs for UK businesses are the highest in the developed world.

Several local businesses, or businesses employing residents of Newcastle-under-Lyme, have closed, or faced closure, in part due to the cost of energy.

The Silverdale and Apedale mines and collieries have long since closed as generators of wealth and employment in the area.

While the aim of rehabilitating the sites as country parks is laudable, the parks have recently become littered with drug paraphernalia, broken bottles and antisocial behaviour.

There may be an opportunity to return the land to a use in keeping with its heritage: generation of energy and wealth. The modern colliery is the wind or solar farm.

I would like the council to carry out an assessment of the economic viability of investing in wind and solar generation at the Silverdale and Apedale sites (preserving the Heritage Centre) to generate income for the Council, and, in particular to use a portion of the revenue to offer grants to local energy intensive businesses to defray energy costs in order to retain and attract investment and employment.

Thank you for your consideration."

The Deputy Chief Executive answered that the sites referred to were not owned by the Borough Council but by Staffordshire County Council.

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12. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Deputy Leader noted that the current Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) would not be attending the next meeting of the Committee as she was leaving the organisation.

The Chair and the Deputy Leader thanked the Service Director for her work and good service to the Committee.

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

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**Councillor Mark Holland
Chair**

Meeting concluded at 7.53 pm