

FINANCE, ASSETS & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

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Present:	Councillor Mark Holland (Chair)		
Councillors:	Bryan Turnock P Waring	Bettley-Smith Stubbs Allport	Grocott Dean
Apologies:	Councillor(s) Parker and Lawley		
Substitutes:	Deputy Mayor. Councillor Joan Whieldon		
Officers:	Simon McEneny Craig Turner Sam Clark Georgina Evans-Stadward	Deputy Chief Executive Service Director - Finance / S151 Officer Service Director - IT & Digital Service Director - Strategy, People and Performance	
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 previous meeting held on 4th September 2025 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2026/27 - FIRST DRAFT SAVINGS PLANS

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the refreshed Medium Term Financial Strategy including the First Draft Savings Plans considered to balance the 2026/27 revenue budget as well as the proposed Capital Programme covering the three years ahead.

The Chair invited members to comment and take the opportunity to suggest alternate or additional savings.

Cllr Stubbs asked how the projected income figures, e.g. the £10,000 for pet cremations and £19,000 for food waste transfer had been calculated and what assumptions underpinned their sustainability over the financial year.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that some extra equipment had been installed at the crematorium for pet cremations and that net income for the first year would be of £10,000 after all of the costs had been taken into account, which was expected to increase over the next few years.

With regards to the food waste transfer station, other local authorities had expressed an interest in taking advantage of the facilities to meet with new legal requirements and a price had been agreed. The £19,000 income was a half year assumption which would likely be doubled by the close of the year.

Cllr Stubbs wondered about what actual assumptions had been made to meet the funding level pertaining to staffing efficiencies and the savings coming from reduced pension contributions as well as how sensitive to market volatility that figure was.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) responded that pension contributions had been reduced from 22% to 19% per employee which was where the majority of the saving came from. A lump sum contribution was also made to the pension fund to address historic deficits in relation to people having retired earlier than anticipated. It was expected that this amount would be staying very similar over the next three years.

Cllr Stubbs asked what evidence supported the tax base growth forecasts and assumed increase of both the Council tax and business rates as well as what contingency were in place given the reliance on housing supply and business growth forecasting.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) said that the Council tax base was calculated on the actual number of homes at the current time and assumptions involving current planning applications. The collection fund amounts over the past few years had demonstrated that forecasts based on these criteria were very closely met every year. Likewise forecasts relating to business rates and business rates appeals, had led to a surplus on the collection fund, part of which may be required to meet a corresponding deficit in the current financial year.

Cllr Stubbs enquired about the certainty level of the extended producer responsibility additional funding of £274,000 which assumed a national policy as well as how the budget would adjust should the policy be delayed or altered.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that a letter confirming a grants allocation of £1.2 million had just been received, which covered the £900,000 allocation assumed in the budget and some extra. The first payment was expected to come the week after the meeting.

Cllr Stubbs asked how sensitive the MTFS funding gap figure was to inflation, interest rates and pay award assumptions as well as what scenario had been put in place in the event it had to be amended.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) responded that all budgets were sensitive to inflation and that a 3% pay award assumption had been factored in for the year ahead, which was above most of what other Staffordshire authorities were accounting for. The budgets for premises costs, transport costs and contract costs

were increased accordingly in line with the CPI (Consumer Price Index). Risk assessments were also carried out and the general fund reserve was there to cover any extra costs.

Cllr Stubbs wondered about risk analysis that had been conducted in terms of delays, shortfalls and anticipated capital receipts.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) advised that there wasn't a great reliance on capital receipts, the majority of which were for the regeneration projects. Capital receipts were being monitored and any need for further reduction would be reflected to Cabinet.

Cllr Stubbs asked what alternative strategies were in place if the fair funding review resulted in a greater than expected cut.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) responded that it was unlikely. A lot of modelling had been done with one of the Council's partners who had a lot of insight into government policy and decisions and considered different scenarios. The status of the actual settlement would be known on the week commencing the 15th of December and while it would probably be a bit more or a bit less than anticipated the figures should be relatively close.

Cllr Stubbs enquired about the target reserve level for financial resilience and how this compared to the CIPFA benchmarks.

The Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) stated that the recommendation was to have about 5% of the Council's net budgets covered by the General Fund Reserve. There was about £2,000,000 in the general fund which corresponded to about 10% and efforts were put in towards continuing to bolster those reserves as a precaution and in anticipation of the uncertainty related to the local government reorganisation.

Cllr Stubbs thanked the Service Director for Finance (S151 Officer) and the rest of the team for the responses provided and the budget put forward.

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth shared his trust for the work undertaken by officers and for the caution with which figures had been put together.

The Chair expressed his satisfaction at having heard more about the assumptions that underpinned the document.

Cllr Whieldon praised the thoroughness and exemplarity of the report and of the efforts put in by both officers and Cabinet members.

The Chair advised that there would be an opportunity for further scrutiny of the budget to be conducted before submission to Full Council.

The Chair also commented on the consistency of the format of the report and caution demonstrated which suggested the finances were very well managed.

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth showed confidence that it was indeed the case, adding that information expected around 15th December would confirm the accuracy of estimates.

Resolved:

1. That the first draft savings proposals as set out in Appendix A and Appendix B to the Report be noted.
2. That the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) funding gap (Appendix C) be noted.
3. That the commencement date of the Budget Consultation period as mid-November to mid-December 2025 be noted.
4. That the Mid-Year Capital Estimates for 2025/26 be noted.
5. That the proposed setting of Council Tax at 1.99 per cent for 2026/2027 be noted.

Watch the debate here

5. FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW REPORT - SECOND QUARTER 2025/26

The Chair introduced the Financial and Performance Review report before inviting members to comment on the Corporate Performance indicators.

ID1.8a -Total number of digital online transactions

The Service Director for Information Technologies advised that the trend was towards a reduction of the number of forms that are to be completed by members of the public with information now available at the start.

Peaks were however observed when launching new services like garden waste or issuing annual bills.

Cllr Stubbs asked what sort of figure should be expected around March.

The Service Director for Information Technologies responded that the current focus was on providing residents with the right experience going through the form. The percentage was to be seen as contextual figure rather than a trend and priority was given to monitoring the feedback received on the form.

The Chair wondered if, in the future, the metric could become a purely contextual figure to be reported and analysed to work out whether it's good or not rather than a performance indicator.

The Chair also invited members to suggest any alternative performance indicators to measure something useful.

Cllr Bryan suggested a kind of metrics based on the emails received, whether or not people knew about the forms, the number of forms that were there and forms that didn't exist.

The Service Director for Information Technologies said that team was working on analysis the data and amount of emails received as part of the launch of the new contact centre system / refreshed telephony and emails. Accessibility and make things easy for visitors would be the key with large buttons to facilitate navigating through the site.

ID1.4a - Total percentage of materials collected for recycling and composting

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth said that he had spoken with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Environment who advised that the target was raised from 49% to 51% to make it more challenging and that the dry summer meant less garden waste had been produced which explained the figures.

ID3.13 – Percentage of fly-tipping incidents where sufficient evidence gathered to proceed to formal enforcement

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth commented that despite best efforts finding evidence i.e. names and / or addresses on items was not an easy task – fly-tippers being cautious not to leave any information behind.

Cllr Stubbs asked if something could be done to address the pile of fly-tipping that had been building up, some of which could be recycled, being mindful of the investigation work that was being carried out.

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth responded that he trusted that officers had this in hands.

The Chair asked if any members wish to bring up any other indicators that wasn't in the red.

ID1.13 - Average number of days per employee lost to sickness

Cllr Grocott noted that details were not provided for privacy reasons and wished for regards to be passed on to employees that were being affected by sickness and long-term illnesses.

The Service Director for Strategy, People and Performance advised that a balance had to be found to allow scrutiny without sharing sensitive information.

ID2.6a and 6b - Percentage of complainants informed within the required timescales of any action to be taken about alleged breaches of planning control

Cllr Grocott suggested there may not be enough staff to cover the amount of complaints received.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that while there had been some struggle in the past with capacity the team was now fully staffed and catching up with previous knock-on effect.

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

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6. TOWN DEAL AND FUTURE HIGH STREET FUNDS UPDATE

The Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holder for Finance, Town Centres and Growth introduced the report on the delivery of projects enabled through the Town Deal and

Future High Street Funds, most of them having reached their completion stage or being not far off.

It was noted that pictures of the progress made in Chesterton had been included to the report as requested by Cllr Grocott at previous meetings.

The Deputy Leader asked Cllr Grocott if anyone had come up to run the Village Hall which construction had been compromised for lack of interested parties to manage it.

Cllr Grocott responded that no-one had.

Cllr Stubbs enquired about the change of scope in relation to the works originally planned at Kidsgrove Train Station – now moved to a smaller area.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the scheme had to be moved away from the area that needed underpinning due to the lack of funding to address the underpinning. Design and costing works were now underway for a smaller area of the site which did not need underpinning.

Cllr Stubbs asked about the project to have a Transport Hub.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that a smaller Transport Hub would be built to allow sufficient space for the car park.

Cllr Allport commented on the wonderful job done on the Canal pathways.

Cllr Grocott shared his gratitude about what had been done in Chesterton.

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

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7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair reminded members that the Committee in its current form would soon be reaching the end of the four-year cycle it had been mandated for with three meetings remaining in 2026.

Resolved: That the work programme be noted.

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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 Thursday 15th January 2026.

Councillor Mark Holland
Chair

Meeting concluded at 7.51 pm