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24 March 2025

Dear Councillor,

**Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee**  
**6:00pm, Tuesday 1 April 2025**  
**Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock**

You are invited to attend this meeting for consideration of the matters itemised in the following Agenda.

Yours sincerely,

**T. Clegg**  
**Chief Executive**

To: Councillors:

Aston, J. (Chair)  
Gaye, D. (Vice-Chair)  
Bullock, L.      Muckley, A.  
Hill, J.O.      Sutherland, M.  
Hughes, G.      Thornley, S.  
Johnson, J.      x1 Vacancy  
Mawle, D.

# Agenda

## Part 1

### 1. Apologies

### 2. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

- (i) To declare any interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (ii) To receive any Party Whip declarations.

### 3. Minutes

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 12 December 2024 and 27 January 2025 (enclosed).

### 4. Officer Capacity / Workload Issues

Presentation from the Head of Transformation and Assurance.

### 5. Development of an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol Working Group

To consider the following recommendations from the Working Group:

- (i) Note the minutes from the working group discussions on 4 September and 9 December 2024 (Item 5.1 - 5.6)
- (ii) Note that proposed amendments to the Constitution, regarding Scrutiny arrangements, were referred to the Constitution Working Group and recommendation onto Council.
- (iii) Consider the adoption of the draft 'Executive Scrutiny Protocol' (Item 5.7 - 5.9).

### 6. Quarter 3 Performance Update 2024/25

Report of the Head of Transformation & Assurance (Item 6.1 - 6.11)

*The documents included are as considered by the Cabinet on 13 March 2025.*

### 7. Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024/25 Update

Verbal update from the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources

**Cannock Chase Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of the**  
**Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee**  
**Held on Thursday 12 December 2024 at 6:00pm**  
**In the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Cannock**

**Part 1**

**Present:**

Councillors

Aston, J. (Chair)  
Gaye, D. (Vice-Chair)  
Hill, J.O.            Muckley, A.  
Johnson, J.        Sutherland, M.  
Mawle, D.           Thornley, S.

**12. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillors L. Bullock, G. Hughes, J. Newbury.

**13. Declarations of Interest of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations**

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were received.

**14. Minutes**

***Point 10, page 10 - capacity issues***

In response to a query from a Member as to whether the situation regarding capacity issues had improved, the Head of Transformation & Assurance advised there had not been any significant improvements owing to ongoing recruitment and workload issues, but since the last meeting, a template had been produced for heads of services to complete about capacity and vacancy issues in their areas. Once completed, there would be a clearer picture of total vacancies, which services were trying to recruit, what success there had been in doing so and wider workload issues.

***Point 14, page 10 - budget planning***

A Member referenced the current year's budget, specifically that it included several earmarked reserves with generic headings, so it was unclear what the funding was for. As such, it was requested that for the budget consultation meeting in January, details be provided of what those reserves were and whether they could be reallocated to other areas.

***Page 16 - installation of solar panels at Rugeley leisure centre***

In response to a query from a Member regarding progress on this matter, the Head of Regulatory Services advised that practical installation was due to commence from 1 October 2024, with the relevant funding payments to be made by 31 October 2024.

The Head of Transformation & Assurance further advised she would liaise with the Head of Wellbeing for a further update to be provided.

## **Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2024 be approved as a correct record.

### **15. Climate Change Work Update**

The Head of Regulatory Services delivered on a presentation on the Council's climate change work that covered the following:

- Draft climate change strategy - this had been produced and was being reviewed by Keele University before being taken to leadership team in early January 2025 and then through the formal report process for approval.
- How Can Local Authorities Influence Climate Change - 'Six Spheres of Influence':
  - Direct control
  - Procurement and commissioning
  - Place shaping
  - Showcasing
  - Partnerships
  - Involving, engaging and communicating.
- Commitment of both Cannock Chase District Council (CCDC) and Stafford Borough Council (SBC) to use their influence to mitigate the effects of climate change in their respective areas.
- Areas of Focus / Strategy Pillars - corporate assets; transport; community engagement; business engagement; and sustainability education.
- Working with the Staffordshire Sustainability Board-including agreement of 10 key pledges - a tracker sheet of performance against the pledges had been developed - the column for this Council needed updating as a lot of work had been done over the past 12 months - this information would be shared with the Committee as it was already in the public domain.
- How to measure success - a lot of work had been going on, but that information had not been shared more widely. A climate change action board was to be established which would meet on a quarterly basis to monitor delivery of targets and actions. It would be comprised of senior officers from the 'Place' services of CCDC and SBC and the relevant Cabinet members, with reports back to Cabinet and Council following each meeting.
- Climate Change Action Plan - an internal tracking document had been developed, but a public-facing version would also be produced in an easy to read and accessible format.
- Next steps - a schools' programme was to be setup building on the success of the 'Great Imagining' event that took place earlier this year. 20 schools would be taking part with visits to be undertaken by 'House of Fairytales' to undertake work and art projects with the aim of having meaningful sessions that would achieve positive outcomes.
- The strategy document was still a work in progress but would cover - background (what is climate change, etc.); the council and the climate emergency; spheres of influences, delivery objectives; pillars of focus; and climate change governance.

Members thanked the Head of Regulatory Services for the presentation and then raised the following comments / queries:

- *Did not see any reference in the draft strategy document to net zero targets and so what would happen if this document was going to be a shared vision with SBC?*

The Head of Regulatory Services advised that this was more of a political discussion but would be sensible for both Cabinets to discuss once the strategy had been developed.

- *The partnership working aspect was pleasing to see - Staffordshire County Council had worked with Keele University for several years and this type of work and had seen a lot of positive outcomes from that relationship.*
- *Did anything in the draft strategy link to the proposed Local Transport Plan being developed by Staffordshire County Council?*

The Head of Regulatory Services advised that the strategy was focused on this Council's own vehicle fleet and infrastructure, i.e., what vehicles it owned, when did they need to be replaced and how best to do so - what would have the biggest impact and what would be the most affordable at the time.

- *It was pleasing to see the hard work being done and information being pulled together as this had been requested for some time now. It was true that councillors and the public did not know where the Council currently was with its climate change work, so the public-facing version of the strategy would be important to help with this.*
- *Congratulation to the Council's Communications team for its work on the Great Imagining project as it was an exceptional event and so it was pleasing to see this being built on with the proposed schools' programme. The House of Fairytales had been very excited to work with that Council and develop that relationship. Also pleased to see the work being done with Keele University.*
- *In the quarter 2 performance update (as included later on the meeting agenda), it states that the 'revised climate change strategy would be developed and in place' in quarter 3, so how was progressing going with this?*

The Head of Regulatory Services advised this action was nearly completed.

- *In the same section of the PDP, it also referenced the 'recruitment of staff to support delivery of strategy and monitor operational delivery'. What progress had been made on this?*

The Head of Regulatory Services advised that funding was in place to recruit to an additional post alongside an existing temporary post. A job description had been produced and two posts would be advertised, which the existing temporary postholder could choose to apply for. It was hoped this would be done during quarter 4 and candidates recruited with the right qualifications and drive to move this work forward. The Communications team had been a big help and having a service manager in place with climate change within their remit did also help from a resilience perspective.

- *Engaging with school pupils was a fantastic idea - would employment within the sustainable energy industries be covered as part of the visits?*

The Head of Regulatory Services advised she had not seen the confirmed programme, but this could be picked up with the organisers. It may however also be dependent on what was being covered with each school age group. Linked to

this, the Staffordshire Business Environment Network had £1m available for businesses located in the District if they could provide match funding. An officer within the Economic Development team was undertaking visits to businesses about grant funding available to them and would also reference this pot of money.

- *In respect of procurement processes, did contractors get 'brownie points' if they used sustainable technologies etc. as part of their work?*

The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised that an addition had been made to the Council's procurement regulations that would mandate officers to look at this as part of procurement work. Once tenders were received it would then be for the relevant officers to assess this as part of the evaluation criteria.

- *When was it hoped to progress the climate change strategy to finalisation?*
- The Head of Regulatory Services advised it was hoped to meet with the Cabinet member before Christmas and then submit to leadership team at the very start of 2025 to progress.

## **16. Development of an Executive-Scrutiny Protocol Working Group**

The Head of Law & Governance provided a verbal update on the two meetings of the working group held on 4 September and 9 December, advising that at the most recent meeting, Members discussed the following:

- How chairs of scrutiny committees could liaise with Cabinet members and officers.
- Committee members meeting informally by themselves once the agenda had been published to discuss agenda items beforehand for issues to be raised by the Chair with lead officers.
- Potentially changing the scrutiny terms of reference in the Constitution to make committee meetings more 'welcoming' for Cabinet members to attend and for the chairs of the committees to be from the opposition parties rather than the Administration - these proposals would be discussed by a few members of the working group for submission to the Constitution Working Group for consideration.

The Chair noted it had been a constructive meeting, and it was hoped the items discussed could be progressed so as to build better relationships between officers and members.

## **17. Quarter 2 Performance Update 2024/25**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Transformation & Assurance (Item 6.1 - 6.12).

The Head of Transformation & Assurance provided the following updates in respect of the report:

- 8/10 actions were on target or had been completed by the end of quarter 2.
- The two behind schedule, '*approval of the Transformation Strategy and Plan*' and '*finalise the digital technology strategy*,' had now been completed as the relevant documents were approved by Cabinet on 28 November.
- All key performance indicators (KPIs) due to report in the quarter were either on target or exceeded target, which was a positive position to be in the half-year stage.

In response to a query from a Member as to why there was no data for the corporate assets KPIs, the Head of Transformation & Assurance advised these had been discussed with the relevant head of service and the indicators set out could only practically be reported on an annual basis.

In response to a query from another Member regarding the closure of accounts, the Head of Transformation & Assurance advised that the action for '*catch up on closure of previous years accounts*' related to the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years. These accounts had been completed and been through the audit process, including presentation to the Audit & Governance Committee in November. Whilst an external audit opinion had been given, it was not the usual one owing to the national backlog of audit work. This position was likely to be replicated for the 2023/24 accounts which were in the process of being closed. A very small number of councils had submitted their accounts for audits, and some had accounts going back at least six years.

Another Member advised he had raised this same issue with the S151 Officer separately, specifically querying whether this information being put out in the public domain would be seen as a problem for the Council. The S151 had given assurances this would not be the case given the national issues and the external auditors had not raised concerns. The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised that the National Audit Office had recently issued a report advising it could not sign off the Whole of Government Accounts due to the local government audit backlog.

#### **18. Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024/25 Update**

The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised that two of the three main items on the work programme had been covered in this meeting, and the capacity/workload issues would be updated on at the March meeting.

In response to a query from a Member as to whether there was anything the committee could do to help with the climate change strategy work, the Head of Regulatory Services advised she would have a think about it and feedback accordingly.

The meeting closed at 6:46 p.m.

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**Chair**

**Cannock Chase Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of the**  
**Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee**  
**Held on Monday 27 January 2025 at 6:00pm**  
**In the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Cannock**

**Part 1**

**Present:**

Councillors

Aston, J. (Chair)  
Gaye, D. (Vice-Chair)  
Bullock, L.      Mawle, D.  
Hill, J.O.      Muckley, A.  
Hughes, G.      Sutherland, M.  
Johnson, J.      Thornley, S.

**Also in Attendance:**

Councillors

- Johnson, T.      (Leader of the Council)
- Prestwood, J.      (Resources and Transformation Portfolio Leader)

**19. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor J. Newbury.

**20. Declarations of Interest of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Interest</b>	<b>Type</b>
Gaye, D.	Agenda Item 5(i) - General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2025-28.  <i>The Member has a relative who works for Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles.</i>	Personal

No party whip declarations were received.

**21. General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2024-2028**

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources & S151 Officer (Item 3.1 - 3.156).

The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources outlined the recommendations as set out in report paragraph 2.1 and then drew reference to the narrative included in report section 3 regarding local government reorganisation and the outcome of the review of culture and heritage services. He then took Members through the main budget information as set out in report section 5.



In response to a query from the Leader regarding the need for the Council to become more dependent on raising income at a local level and whether 90% of the financing in future years would be raised by business rates income and Council Tax, the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that this was correct for the core elements of the Council's funding and spending power as there had been a significant change in local government funding in recent years from central government grants to locally raised income.

Members of the Committee then raised questions/comments on the draft budget proposals as follows:

1. Was the 2024/25 forecast outturn position as referenced in paragraph 5.21 the position as at the end of 31 March 2025?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised this was correct, based on period 6 budget monitoring information.*

2. Why was there a predicted negative interest on balances of £200,000 in 2025-26?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resource advised this was interest on funds held on behalf of others (such as for S106 monies) and the figure had been estimated down as less interest had been paid in recent years.*

3. In respect of unallocated reserves, what funding was available to the Council?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that £1 million was allocated within the working balances and so anything not included in that balance was an earmarked reserve.*

4. Who was the Council having discussions with regarding the future of the Prince of Wales Theatre and the Museum of Cannock Chase?

*The Leader advised that a group from the local arts council had met with the Council and submitted an outline business plan which was being reviewed by officers and discussions were ongoing.*

5. Was anything happening with the Cannock Park golf course?

*The Leader advised that the golf course was making a small surplus, but the Council wanted to see it making a bigger surplus thereby taking alleviating pressure on funding other health and wellbeing provision.*

6. Paragraphs 3.8 and 3.16 use the word 'subsidy' when referring to funding support for the Theatre and Museum. This word should be removed as the funding provision is a contractual obligation.

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that it was a subsidy within the contractual amount paid to Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles (IHL). The wording could be amended to state that these elements were loss making based on what the Council paid IHL as part of the contract.*

Concerned that negative wording is used throughout the report regarding the management of the contract and the future of the Theatre and Museum, so do not think that words such as 'subsidy' or 'loss' should be used.

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised he would take those comments on board.*

7. Appendix 10 of the report states that the petition regarding the proposed closure of the Theatre was presented to the Council on 2 January 2025. Who was it

presented it to given that Councillor Mawle presented it at the 22 January 2025 full Council meeting?

*The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised she would check with relevant officers who had been processing the consultation responses, but it was understood the Theatre petition was submitted as part of the consultation.*

8. Given that the survey closed on 2 January and the papers for this meeting were published on the 17 January, were officers saying that full consideration of over 2,000 survey responses had been undertaken diligently in that two-week period?

*The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised that a significant number of responses were received during the first week the consultation was open, so officers had been collating and analysing the responses as the consultation period continued.*

9. It was noted that when the survey first opened, it was missing some information about the Theatre, so how many people were affected by this error and were they made aware?

*The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised that officers made the best efforts they could to make the public aware of the error which only affected a small number of people. A very small number of surveys had been received by the time the error was picked up and corrected straight away.*

10. How much of the report was written in advance of the consultation closing?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised he could not speak to how much of the report had been written and when.*

11. In the second bullet point at the top of page 3.4, the last sentence seemed to use negative wording again and this was disappointing given the report was supposed to be written in an unbiased way.

*The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised that the wording used reflected the 'scoring' as set out in the survey, with people asked to rank their own perceived level of importance of the categories included.*

12. In report paragraph 3.16, what was meant by 'short to medium term'?

13. *The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that short term was the annual budget forecast and medium term was the three year forward looking position which the budget report was based on.*

14. As referred to in report paragraph 3.18 iii, how much money had been set aside for decommissioning of the leisure, culture & heritage services?

15. *The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised he would need to check and provide this figure separately, but it would be an estimated figure based on the best guess available at this time.*

How could a best guess for this work be determined when the Council had not decommissioned these services previously?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the budgets were based on estimates and officers' views at the time the report was prepared.*

16. As referred to in report paragraph 3.21, how much money had been set aside for consultancy support for those groups who currently used the Theatre and/or Museum?

*The Deputy Chief Executive advised that a flexible position was being taken at this time based on the robustness of the business plans being developed. Whilst it was not expected that the general public would pull on that consultancy support, the Council would work with groups and interested parties on what they wanted to provide and what support they were looking for.*

*The Leader further advised that the Council was offering its services to help those who were looking to take on the running of those facilities, but a figure could not be provided without knowing what work needed to be done.*

17. The Council had a forecast deficit in 2025/26 of £1.3 million, £300,000 of which would be covered by the closure of the Theatre and Museum, so could that £300,000 not be found from other sources?

*The Deputy Chief Executive Resources advised that the Council would have to find that money from underspends in other budget areas during the year. This work needed to be prioritised from very limited resources and a very difficult financial position faced. The Council did not want to stop groups from working it with to find alternative solutions.*

*The Resources & Transformation Portfolio Leader further advised that no decisions had been made as yet, so it would be very difficult to make estimates on decommissioning costs and consultancy fees and so a budget had to be determined based on the information known at the current time.*

18. The impact on the Council's partners as a result of the changes to employers' National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and the possible need for the Council to provide support to them as referenced in paragraph 5.5 was more considered to be a subsidy than mentioned earlier in the meeting. The NIC increases were a cause of concern for both the Council and its partners.
19. The wording in brackets in paragraph 5.8 regarding the proposed Business Rates resent in 2026/27 and that the Council may not exist in its current form by that time was a concern. How did the S151 Officer approach this and budget for a reduction in Business Rates and how would it affect the Council?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the Council had to operate as a going concern and on a statutory basis. An annual balanced budget had to be set but a forward looking position taken also.*

*The Leader further advised that if the Council did no longer exist in its current form the residents of the District would still exist and so any changes in Business Rates income would affect them so it was only right that such issues were raised now.*

20. Investment income being higher than budgeted for was a positive position, so could that money not be used to help residents moving forward? The long-term thinking was that the Council should be using money such as the additional £850,000 to keep facilities open.

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that from a fiscal point of view the increased investment income was a one-off windfall that could not be put into budgets for future years. The Council was already in a financially stretched position so it had to demonstrated it would not tip over into a financially calamitous position. It would be important to move into any new authority with a position of fiscal strength as they would need to work from a new base level rather than supporting facilities that required additional funding support.*

21. Paragraph 5.27 mentions that the budgets were in general based on the delivery of the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan referenced that the Council would move forward with the development of a culture hub and refurbishment of the Theatre as part of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) scheme, so why had the Council now moved away from the position?

*The Leader advised that he did not feel this was the case.*

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources further advised that no final budget decisions had been made yet as this would be done at the 12 February full Council meeting. Funding was still included in the LUF scheme for the projects mentioned and so formed part of the discussions being held with local groups. It was therefore considered the Corporate Plan priorities were still being met.*

*The Leader further advised that the problem faced after any investment element would be how to fund the ongoing revenue costs to support the running of the facilities in future years.*

22. Being told that no decision had been made, but the report to be considered by Cabinet on Thursday was recommending closure of the Theatre and Museum. Did not feel comfortable that this was what the Committee was being asked to support.
23. The Council needed to look at the worst-case scenario position, accepting that work was going on in the background and set a budget on what it knew at this moment in time.
24. Paragraph 5.43 referenced that an additional 1% increase in Council Tax above the proposed 2.99% would generate approximately £80,000 per year for the Council. Was the 1% figure correct?

*(Councillor Bullock left meeting at this point)*

25. Noting that the consultation for the Theatre and Museum proposals had taken place over the Christmas and New Year period, why had the Council left it so late in the day to undertake the consultation when issues about the Museum were known at least two years ago?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the Council did not know about the changes to NICs until late in the year and the impact that would have on the IHL budget. It had a massive impact on them hence why the consultation only happened when it did. The Council did also not receive the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement until 18 December.*

26. With regard to just the Museum, back in 2023, Councillor Preece as the relevant portfolio leader advised that a full options appraisal for the future of the Museum would be undertaken and that it would be ready by the end of 2023. At the same meeting of this Committee in early 2024 the question was asked about this options appraisal and the response received that it would still be forthcoming. On that basis, why did this budget report only present one option for consideration?

*(Councillor Bullock returned to the meeting at this point.)*

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that extensive work had been undertaken with IHL since November 2023 and business planning for future service offer and moving forward, but the recent issues had brought matters to a head.*

November 2023 to November 2024 was a big gap between those conversations happening and the issues coming light, so this would have allowed sufficient time for the consultation to take place sooner.

*The Leader advised that consultants had been engaged earlier in 2024 on the future provision of the Theatre and Museum offer but unfortunately the outcomes of those reports were not what the Council wanted to see. The reports were written in the summer of 2024 and the final versions submitted to the Council in the autumn, with the consultation then undertaken in late autumn/early winter.*

27. The consultation being undertaken over the Christmas and New Year period was a massive issue given that people were likely to be away on holiday at some point during that time. When part of the coalition Cabinet meetings were held with officers and IHL to raise concerns about the future of the Museum and on several occasions it was suggested to officers that this situation could have been dealt with sooner. Officers were continually asked about the Museum issue and the options appraisal and it appeared that nothing was ever produced or put into the public domain.

It was concerning that the report recommended closure of the Theatre and Museum and that full consideration had been given to over 2,000 survey responses and 2 significant petitions submissions within a two-week timeframe. The reasons for why the proposals had been brought to the table so late could not be accepted and were being rushed through with Members and the public. People had to be held accountable and know what they were doing.

There were other options available, but the main concern was the report stating there was only one option to take forward.

*The Leader advised that in respect of the Museum, a meeting had been held around 20 months ago in Hednesford with a group about setting up a charitable trust for the Museum, but the proposal was dismissed by them.*

28. With regards to horizon scanning, the issue of capacity was worrying for all heads of service and councillors. Was the budget based on the expected wage bill for the year and current staffing levels or on what the Council should be paying and what staffing levels it actually wanted?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised it was based on the full current staffing structure, including vacant posts. Whilst it was preferable to have a high level of staffing this was unaffordable. Reducing the use of agency staff and consultants would however help this situation.*

29. There was concern the Council would have to make further cuts as it could not afford to cut its cloth anymore going forward.

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the Council would have to look at operating its statutory services only as there was no more room for slack. It was hoped however that no further cuts would have to be made.*

30. For the £80,000 additional Council Tax funding referred to earlier, did the Council only take 12.5% of that amount?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that some of the funding had to be allocated to Staffordshire County Council and the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, so whilst the report was mathematically correct, the relevant paragraph would be reworded to reflect the actual amount of additional funding this Council received.*

31. Going back to the meeting in Hednesford referenced by the Leader earlier which was also attended by Councillor Preece (as the relevant portfolio leader), the meeting was with the Friends of Hednesford Community Volunteers and Councillor Mawle was the current chair of the group. The group had circa 20 active members who were mostly pensioners and had a budget of less than £1,000 per year, so was not the kind of group who could take over the running of the Museum. The group appreciated being told what the situation was, but it was hoped more research would be done in the future about appropriate groups who could take it on.

*The Leader advised that work was happening, and the Council would seek to preserve the facilities as best it could for the future.*

32. The idea back in 2023 was that the Council should be keeping such facilities open, and the coalition Cabinet would work to secure the long-term future of the Museum. Councillor Elson as the relevant portfolio leader at the time had met with officers and partner organisations to discuss what could be done. Nothing however was progressed as officers advised that no definitive position had been given by Members on how they wanted to save the Museum.
33. Any acronyms used in the report (such as DFGs for Disabled Facilities Grants) should be explained to help people understand better when reading the report.
34. If the position was reached whereby the Council no longer existed, what would happen to any unspent funding, and could it be given back?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that legally, it was for the prerogative of Members to make that decision, but it was still not certain at this stage whether the Council would go, and the needs of the future authority would also have to be kept in mind.*

35. The bullet point at the top of page 3.11 referenced a new budget reserve that had been created. There was concern that money kept being put away for a rainy day and not spent, but the situation with the Theatre and Museum was a rainy day situation but the money was not being used for that purpose. According to appendix 6 the Council had circa £15 million set aside in reserves to be used for a rainy day, so why was none of that funding being used?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the budget gap in future years was significant, and the Council had to budget for future years on a going concern basis which was a legal requirement. The future position was unknown, and the Council had to be fiscally responsible for the District. As S151 Officer, that statement had to be made as part of the budget setting process.*

36. Why couldn't the £1.5 million contingency reserve fund be used to prevent the closures of the Theatre and Museum?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that fund was there to support the ongoing budget position. Additional support may need to be brought in because of the local government reorganisation proposals and the use of consultants to support groups with developing their own proposals.*

Could we not then use some of this funding to give interested groups a longer period of time to come up with proposals, accepting these funds could only be used once? It was also concerning there was £6 million of 'other' earmarked reserve, but not detail included on what those were.

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the 'other' reserve was comprised of things such as Business Rates mitigations and funds for some minor historic schemes. It would not be fiscally responsible to use reserves to plug the funding issue of the Theatre and Museum.*

37. What was being done with the money sat in the earmarked reserves as it appeared to never be spent. At the last meeting of the Committee in November it was requested that a detailed breakdown be provided on the earmarked reserves, but this information had not been forthcoming. Having it available would have helped with considering other options available.

It could also be guaranteed that when the new authority was formed, it would not use that money to the benefit of this District.

38. Members were deciding on the Council's budget position so could choose to keep the Theatre and Museum open if that wanted to. The budget figures could be moved around to make this work.

39. The Committee was here to scrutinise the budget, not make policy decisions. It was hoped that officers and the Leader had taken on board what had been discussed and consider those comments as part of its forthcoming budget meetings.

40. The Committee was here to scrutinise how the budget was put together, not to debate the budget itself. Once the final position had been formed it was up to other Members / Groups to submit alternative budgets if they so wished.

41. Councillors Mawle and Muckley had been working with the community group interested in taking over the Theatre and Museum and this had taken up a lot of time. It was not known whether the Conservative Group or the Administration would support an alternative budget put forward by the Green Group, so did not want to take time away from officers and Members to discuss the Cabinet's proposals if there was no chance the alternative budget would be passed.

If you could convince all Members that it was the right thing to do then it would likely get passed. Also, regardless of political party, alternative budgets should be submitted to show what each Group would do differently.

42. In the environment & climate change portfolio expenditure on page 3.19, were the third-party payments under the Waste & Recycling service for the Biffa contract?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources confirmed this was correct.*

43. On the same page, under Regulatory Services, why were employee expenses projected to increase by £60,000 next year?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised this was because of additional resource required to deliver the service.*

44. On the same page, under Cleansing Services, what were the £450,000 per year third party payments for?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised he would check this and report back accordingly.*

45. In the Leader's portfolio on page 3.29, Members expenses were projected to increase each year, but should this be amended based on the decision at last week's full Council meeting to freeze allowances at their current rate for the next 4 years?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the budget was written based on what was recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel, so a saving would be achieved each year based on what Council had agreed.*

Would it be possible to amend the budget figures in the report to reflect what was agreed, so a 'correct' budget position would be taken forward for consideration?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised the budget updates throughout the year would reflect the updated position, but amending the figures could cause issues elsewhere in the report, so it was better to leave it as presented.*

46. Given the increases in NICs and their likely impact on small businesses, particularly those who were minimum wage employers, had a prudent enough position been included in the budget to cover any potential increases in Business Rates bad debts provision?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that the bad debts provision had not been significantly increased at this time based on external advice received, but this could happen during the year, hence the need for the contingency reserve fund.*

47. The frustration was that the report did not provide enough financial detail for the Committee to determine what it could put forward as recommendations to Cabinet. It was difficult to go with anything other than what was in the report or just saying no to the proposals. It did not feel like the budget had been scrutinised in the same way it used to. There needed to be a system in place to see the budget figures during the year far more visibly and regularly.

*The Leader raised that the point was well made, but the budget proposed reflected the level of uncertainty the Council faced, and that setting budgets based on projections and estimates was how local government funding had always operated. In 25 total years of being a councillor, this was the most uncertain funding position ever seen.*

48. Agree with the point about the lack of financial information, which meant the Committee could not adequately scrutinise what was being proposed or feedback to Cabinet. It was suggested that Cabinet ask for alternative budgets to come forward for their consideration. It would be easier to consider big decisions if detailed were provided on what the alternative options were.

49. The report was difficult to read for people without an understanding of accounting, so if the Council wanted Members to properly scrutinise the budget then training should be provided on how to understand / read the report and what to scrutinise within it.

Budgetary / accounting information was difficult to learn. For those qualified to do so it required several years of training and exams. A balance needed to be found on what information to provide without making the reports too long.

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised there was no capacity within the Finance team to deliver training and much of what was in the report was higher level detail in order that it could be presented in a public format. There was a lot of technical detail underneath, and a balance needed between the team supporting the delivery of frontline services and providing information in such reports. Once the budget monitoring work was fully back up and running Members would see that detail being provided to them once again.*



*Any Members or Groups wishing to submit an alternative budget should book an appointment with the S151 Officer to go through their proposals and they had to be signed off as achieving a balanced budget position.*

50. In the capital programme as included in report appendix 3, was the Stile Cop Cemetery Modular Build to do with the old keepers house?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised this related to an amenity space for the cemetery worked based there.*

*(Councillor Bullock left the meeting at this point.)*

51. In appendix 4, only two Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) projects were listed for 2024/25, whereas in previous years more had been included. Why therefore had only those two been put in and others not?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised this was most likely because of the monetary value or them being new projects.*

52. In last year's budget report reference was included in the proposed list of budget savings for car parking charges in Hednesford and Rugeley. No mention of this appeared in the 2025/26 report so was this still being taken forward?

*Councillor Mawle advise that this was still moving forward, and work was taking place with officers about it.*

53. How much income had been received since the charges were put in place for use of the tennis courts?

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised he would need to check this with the relevant head of service, but any reference to it in the budget would be included in the fees and charges section of the relevant portfolio area.*

*(Councillor Bullock returned to meeting at this point.)*

54. Where and when were the facilitated drop-in sessions for the Theatre and Museum consultation held and how were they advertised?

*The Head of Transformation & Assurance advised they were advertised online and with flyers. They were held in libraries and other venues across the District at a frequency of two per week for the first three weeks in December.*

55. The penultimate paragraph on page 3.69 implied that the response rate to the survey was low when compared to the total number of households in the District. Since becoming a councillor, had not seen any other survey achieve over 2,000 replies, so it was concerning again that negative language was being used.

*It did not feel like the overwhelming wishes on the people in the District were being taken into account and the report recognise that this was a high response rate compared to usual survey response levels.*

*The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised it could be amended to state that the response rate was 5% of the total households to make it read less negative. A statistical analysis had been provided and so there was a need to be careful of the language used. Comparing one consultation response to another became a very subjective position.*

*It could be stated that statistically the response rate was low, but compared to previous consultations it was a good response rate.*

The following proposals were then put forward by the members of the Committee for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 30 January 2025, and duly seconded:

- i) That the report goes forward to Cabinet with the critiques that have been raised by the Committee for Cabinet's consideration.
- ii) That the bad debts provision be reviewed and increased to a higher amount.
- iii) That the word 'subsidy' be removed from paragraphs 3.8 and 3.16.

A vote was then taken on each of the proposals in turn, and it was:

**Resolved:**

That:

- (A) The report goes forward to Cabinet with the critiques that have been raised by the Committee for Cabinet's consideration.
- (B) The bad debts provision be reviewed and increased to a higher amount.

The meeting closed at 8:15 p.m.

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**Chair**

**Cannock Chase Council**  
**Notes of the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol Working Group**  
**Held on Wednesday 4 September 2024 at 6:00pm**  
**Via Microsoft 'Teams'**

**Present:**

**Councillors:**

J. Johnson	Opposition Councillor
T. Johnson	Leader of the Council
D. Mawle	Green Group Councillor
D. Todd	Chair of the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

**Officers:**

I. Curran	Head of Law & Governance
M. Berry	Democratic Services Team Leader

**1. Appointment of Chair**

The Head of Law & Governance advised that as per the motion agreed by full Council in March 2024, the working group had to be chaired by an opposition / Green councillor.

Owing to several members being absent, the Leader of the Council took the Chair for this meeting only.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies had been received from

- Councillor F. Prestwood, Chair of the Health, Wellbeing and The Community Scrutiny Committee.
- Councillor A. Muckley, Leader of the Green Group.
- Councillor G. Hughes, Opposition Councillor.

**3. Development of Executive-Scrutiny Protocol**

The Head of Law & Governance drew Members attention to the overview document (agenda item 3.(a)), which set out the background to why the working group had been established and what it was being asked to consider. The overview document also set out for reference the current guidance and policies in use by the Council for how the scrutiny function operated (as included with the agenda at items 3.(b) to 3.(d)), along with examples of key topics covered by executive-scrutiny protocols adopted by other local authorities.

Members then raised the following points:

- Scrutiny was not working effectively at the Council - it needed to show it was scrutinising decision making and positively impacting on residents' lives.
- Scrutiny chairs and members should examine the powers that already exist and use them, and work with portfolio leaders.
- Want to see a protocol that enabled scrutiny to be more effective as it also had a role to play in policy development, which could not just keep happening via motions to Council. It was important that opposition members were involved in the policy framework.

## Item No. 5.2

- Agree that scrutiny was not working at the Council - there was a disconnect between scrutiny and the Cabinet - supposed to be working together but this was not happening.
- When previously a councillor when the scrutiny system first came into being, didn't feel at the time it was working effectively and don't feel now that it works effectively everywhere. Part of the problem was Cabinet members and the Leader not being invited to scrutiny meetings to answer questions from members. Part of the issue with this was perhaps a breakdown of trust between parties rather than individuals, but there was a need to find a way for all to work together.
- It was considered that the issues faced by this Council with operation of the scrutiny function were the same as across the country, but it had to be operated on a cross-party basis. Working together to get things right was the main priority and then matters being taken to Cabinet to be looked at properly.
- Scrutiny chairs, along with committee members, should pick topics to be identified for review.
- At Cabinet meetings attention was always drawn to the forward plan and Members encouraged to read it to know what was coming forward.
- Agree with the point about the forward plan, but part of the problem was formal scrutiny meetings being so few and far between during the year.
- It should also be kept in mind that the 'call-in' function could be used if there was a matter scrutiny members wished to discuss with the Cabinet.
- Agree with the point about call-in, but there had to be certainty about whether something should be called-in given officers and members time involved with such meetings.
- Smaller parties could feel lost if not part of the Administration so scrutiny could help them feel less lost in the process.
- The scrutiny committees perhaps needed to scrutinise themselves and understand better what powers they already had - willing to assist scrutiny to scrutinise the Cabinet encourage policy development for the Cabinet.

The Head of Law & Governance noted that from an officer perspective, this was a topic councils across the country were having to grapple with. Whilst there was statutory guidance in place and information available from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, there was no set way on how scrutiny should function, so it was left for each council to determine its own arrangements. It was easier to display good scrutiny when the topic under scrutiny had clear importance to the Councils priorities, and the wider public interest, and therefore where scrutiny could be seen to add value to council decision making. While case studies of good practice could be found at Unitary/Upper-Tier authorities, the district would need to ensure its own arrangements were proportionate and reflected its own available resources and infrastructure.

It was then agreed that this discussion be continued further when all members of the working group could be available to attend.

The meeting closed at 6:30pm.

**Cannock Chase Council**  
**Notes of the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol Working Group**  
**Held on Monday 9 December 2024 at 5:15pm**  
**Via Microsoft 'Teams'**

**Present:**

**Councillors:**

J. Aston	Chair of the Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee
G. Hughes	Opposition Councillor
J. Johnson	Opposition Councillor (joined 5:34pm)
T. Johnson	Leader of the Council
D. Mawle	Green Group Councillor
A. Muckley	Leader of the Green Group
F. Prestwood	Chair of the Health, Wellbeing and The Community Scrutiny Committee

**Officers:**

I. Curran	Head of Law & Governance
M. Berry	Democratic Services Team Leader

**1. Appointment of Chair**

Councillor Muckley was appointed Chair of the Working Group.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Councillor D. Todd, Chair of the Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee.

**3. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting held on 4 September 2024 were accepted.

**3. Development of Executive-Scrutiny Protocol**

The Head of Law & Governance reminder Members of the purpose of the working group being established, as per the Council motion agreed in March 2024.

Members then raised the following points:

- The LGA had its own toolkit in place which was a useful reference tool for councillors.
- Have felt for a while that the scrutiny committees were not as effective as they should be.
- In respect of motions to Council, if it was considered that matters would be better picked up by the scrutiny committees then Members needed to be willing and able to look at those things-it was considered the existing procedures did not support this.
- Look at the Council's own toolkit to understand how scrutiny was supposed to operate locally and how it could be improved-suggest portfolio leaders had regular meetings with scrutiny committees' chairs to keep up to date with what has going on. Members needed to exercise their rights more and say what they wanted to scrutinise.
- Lack of detail in committee reports made it difficult for Members to scrutinise matters, although it was appreciated a balance was needed about the level of detail to include.

- It was tricky for officers to give a lot of detail on matters-suggest that Members of each committee meet following agenda publication to discuss agenda items and then the respective chairs meet with lead officers separately.
- Being part of a small group made it difficult to scrutinise matters, so the informal pre-meetings could help with this and create less confrontational formal meetings.

*(Councillor J. Johnson joined the meeting at this point.)*

- The pre-meeting suggestion was a good idea as long as it did not take up too much time and ensure the right issues were covered and the right questions raised. They should be held on Teams and start at 6pm to help maximise attendance.
- Work should happen with officers to ensure that reports included the right level of detail for matters to be considered effectively.
- Agree on the above point, but do not want to create additional workload for officers in having to write longer reports.
- Chairs should meet with officers regularly to be updated on things happening and what was coming forward on meeting agendas-need to know what officers were thinking and officers needed to know what the chairs were doing.
- Once the pre-meeting had happened a decision could be made on whether the relevant Cabinet member(s) needed to attend the formal committee meeting.
- Concern about Cabinet members having to attend all meeting-suggestion of chairs meeting with them was to understand why attendance was requested and then could leave the meeting once their item had finished. Existing powers should be better used rather than having to try and reinvent the wheel.
- Opposition members should chair the scrutiny committees, but for now, the way forward was to ensure co-operation across the board.
- Consider whether pre-meetings could be used to have input into what items were included on agendas so that Members took more ownership of the committee meetings.
- The type of pre-meeting being discussed would not allow for this to happen as it would be held following agenda publication. A 'mid-point' meeting could happen if things cropped up during the year that Members wished to discuss formally. It was appreciated this would add more meetings into the calendar but did not want to make it too onerous for everyone.
- If it was being suggested that motions not be put on Council agendas, then it became more difficult for Members to raise issues without input into committee agendas.

*The Head of Law & Governance raised that production of work programmes was an issue faced by many councils. Whilst they should be member-led, they also needed to be built around the priorities of the Council and District. A work programming session could be held to agree on items for the year, but with capacity to add in extra items if felt needed. This would however need to fit around officer workload and the framework of the Council.*

- The point about work programme setting was important-how could Members get accountability on agreed matters not being discussed and work with officers to ensure meetings were more productive?

*The Head of Law & Governance noted this was where the collaborative aspect came in-if Members raised good idea that would divert from existing work then there could be some pushback from officers given they had priorities from the Cabinet to work on. Scrutiny was democratic; the conversations between Cabinet members and committee chairs was important, as well as understanding the Forward Plan and Council's priorities.*

- It was more about the ethos of the committees and getting the additional meetings to happen-real change was needed if everyone wanted scrutiny to work and not having people working in silos-scrutiny members, Cabinet, and leadership team needed to be able to talk to each other.
- Part of the problem was there could be a conflict of interest with the majority of committee members also being part of the Administration-this created an issue of what could/could not be discussed. Should the terms of reference be amended so that scrutiny was undertaken by the opposition parties.
- Cabinet did not tell scrutiny what to do, so not sure if the Constitution could be changed for that purpose?

*The Head of Law & Governance advised that by law, the committees had to be politically proportionate, and statutory guidance set out that non-Administration members should operate as a 'critical friend' rather than the opposition. Reference could be included in the terms of reference for chairs to be from the opposition parties, but this would be subject to majority approval by full Council.*

- Confirm that as a Member of the Administration, have not been influenced by the Group as to what could or could not be discussed at the committee meetings-this was good to know but was down to perception which could be impacted by how large the Administration was. It could possibly be useful to have a vice-chair from the majority group as this would show collaborative working.
- Having elections by thirds also impacted this issue as the Leader and Administration could change in 18 months-time and change again the year after.
- This was potentially why this work needed to be done correctly to ensure that the right protocol was in place, making scrutiny more effective and allowing time for any new arrangements to bed in ready for after the 2026 elections.
- Agree with the point about potential conflict of interest when the Administration had a large majority-the general public had to see that someone was holding the controlling party to account-the best way for this was via the scrutiny committees.
- Would a recommendation need making to the Constitution Working Group (CWG) for the terms of reference to be amended?

*The Head of Law & Governance advised that the Democratic Services Team Leader could circulate to Members information on how to suggest amendments to the CWG.*

- Suggest therefore that Members meet separately to consider wording for submission to the CWG-also request that any suggestions be brought to this group first for consideration.
- Also suggest that the terms of reference be changed to require that chairs meet with relevant portfolio leaders.

*The Head of Law & Governance suggested this should not be a formal procedure rule of the Council but relevant to the Protocol.*

*The Head of Law & Governance then suggested that in paragraph 16.9 of the terms of reference, the sentence shown in bold (below) may need amending to be more flexible about a Cabinet member attendance at a committee meeting:*

*"Any member of the Executive may, if invited by the Chair, attend a meeting of a Scrutiny Committee for a specific item. They may answer the questions and at the invitation of the Chair, speak. **The member of the Executive shall only attend for that specific item and shall leave the meeting at the conclusion of that item.**"*

- Agree with this suggestion-it may be beneficial for the Cabinet member(s) to remain in the meeting to understand more about what matters were being discussed.
- Agree that could stay if they wished to do so, but only in an observer capacity for the rest of the meeting and not be asked to keep answering questions.

*The Head of Law & Governance suggested the sentence could be removed from the terms of reference, but the Protocol be written to reflect what could be done in terms of raising issues.*

*The Head of Law & Governance then sought clarity on how the proposed pre-meetings would operate, taking into account the agenda publication deadlines and ensuring important matters were not discussed outside of the public domain as the formal meetings should be open and transparent.*

- The pre-meetings would be for committee members to discuss what was on the formal meeting agenda, identify where further information was needed and what the focus of the formal meeting would be. Chairs would feedback to the lead officers on what was discussed so better information was available at the formal meetings to enable better discussions and making of recommendations. The information should be shared with all committee members to ensure constructive discussions could happen.

*The Head of Law & Governance advised these meetings could happen with a day or two of the formal agenda being published, but this would leave limited time to invite the relevant Cabinet member(s) to the committee meeting. Need to get into a process of Cabinet members knowing when the formal meetings were regardless of whether or not they needed to attend. The law states they can be required to attend, but there was no set timescale at present of when the invites should be made.*

- There needed to be some level of flexibility for Cabinet attendance as it could be that prior engagement was necessary or time taken to find out the information requested. If they were not able to attend then information could be circulated between meetings or they be invited to attend the following meeting.
- If the pre-meeting was held the day after the agenda was published then it would be known at that point if the Cabinet member(s) needed to attend the formal meeting. The chair could contact them straight after the pre-meeting which would give time for them to get prepared and the Chair to speak with officers ready for the formal meeting.

The following actions were then noted:

- i) Councillors Aston, Hughes and Muckley to meet and decide on wording for consideration by the Constitution Working Group in respect of opposition members chairing the formal committees. The Leader asked to be involved in those discussions at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure work was not wasted.
- ii) The suggested final version of the Protocol would be recommendations from this group for consideration by the Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee.
- iii) If required, a further meeting of this group be held on 23 January 2025.

The meeting closed at 6:38pm.



## Executive- Scrutiny Protocol

### 1. Introduction

This protocol is designed to be used alongside and complement the Scrutiny Committees Terms of Reference and the Scrutiny and Call-In Procedure Rules set out in the Constitution, and the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit provided to councillors. It sets out practical expectations for both Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees (“OSCs”) and the Cabinet.

### 2. Identifying roles of Cabinet and Scrutiny

The Cabinet is made up of the Leader, who is elected by full Council, and up to nine other councillors chosen by the Leader. The Cabinet is a decision-making body and is responsible for the majority of decision making at the Council, save for matters that are reserved to full Council. Any decisions must be within the budget set by full Council.

The Council is required to establish at least one OSC, and they act as a check and balance on the Cabinet. OSCs are not decision-making bodies, but are able to scrutinise decisions that the Cabinet are planning to take (e.g. policy review and development), those it plans to implement (through use of call-in procedures) and those that have already been taken or implemented (e.g. performance review).

Statutory Guidance on the role of Overview and Scrutiny was produced by the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government in April 2024. It advises that:

*Effective overview and scrutiny should:*

- *Provide constructive “critical friend” challenge*
- *Amplify the voices and concerns of the public*
- *Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role*
- *Drive improvement in public services and strategic decision-making*

*Recommendations following scrutiny enable improvements to be made to policies and how they are implemented. Overview and scrutiny committees can also play a valuable role in developing policy.*

### 3. Expectations of OSC and its members

Members of OSCs should:

- Prepare for attendance at meetings including reading agendas and reports, attending any briefing sessions and developing lines of questioning.
- Secure a substitute if unable to attend.
- Develop a constructive, respectful, critical friend relationship with the Cabinet and officers.
- Provide purposeful challenge to the Cabinet and service performance.
- Take a strategic perspective, focusing on the wider community outcomes.
- Work as a team, irrespective of political allegiance to deliver the OSC roles and responsibilities.

- Extend an invitation to Cabinet to participate in meetings where matters within their portfolio are being discussed
- Participate in consideration and setting of work planning for the OSC
- Attend informal meetings of OSC designed to brief members or aid in effective scrutiny of upcoming scrutiny work.

#### 4. Expectations of Cabinet and its members

Members of Cabinet should:

- Attend OSC meetings where appropriate (e.g. where matters relevant to their portfolio are being discussed or when invited to be questioned by the OSC).
- Recognise and value OSC and be open to constructive challenge.
- Identify opportunities for OSC to support and influence their work.
- Respect the independence of OSC and their chosen work programmes.
- Work with OSC to develop a constructive, respectful, critical friend relationship.
- Sit separately from the main committee to ensure a clear distinction between roles.
- Speak through, or when brought in by, the OSC Chair.

#### 5. Role of OSC Chair

The statutory guidance explains that *“The Chair plays a leadership role on a scrutiny committee as they are largely responsible for establishing its profile, influence and ways of working. They should possess the ability to lead and build a sense of teamwork and consensus among committee members. Chairs should pay special attention to the need to guard the committee’s independence. Importantly, however, they should take care to avoid the committee being, and being viewed as, a de facto opposition to the executive.”*

In addition, the OSC Chair should:

- Attend and participate in informal meetings of OSC Chairs to co-ordinate and discuss work programmes.
- Attend and participate in informal meetings of the relevant OSC to discuss items in upcoming agendas, where prior informal discussion is considered appropriate to assist with the effectiveness of scrutiny at that meeting.
- Look to give reasonable advance notice to Cabinet Members if their presence at an upcoming OSC meeting is to be requested.
- Ensure scrutiny is member-led and independent and set the tone for constructive challenge.
- Manage meetings, enabling debate and maintaining focus of the function.
- Meet with Cabinet Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers, when appropriate, to aid understanding of any scrutiny work.

## 6. Work planning

The statutory guidance advises that, *“While scrutiny has the power to look at anything which affects “the area, or the area’s inhabitants”, authorities will often find it difficult to support a scrutiny function that carries out generalized oversight across the wide range of issues experienced by local people, particularly in the context of partnership working, Prioritisation is necessary, which means that there might be things that, despite being important, scrutiny will not be able to look at. Effective scrutiny should have a defined impact on the ground, with the committee making recommendations that will make a tangible difference to the work of the authority. To have this kind of impact, scrutiny committees need to plan their work programme, i.e. draw up a long-term agenda and consider making it flexible enough to accommodate any urgent, short-term issues that might arise during the year”*.

OSC's should seek to set its annual work programme at its first meeting of that municipal year. Councillors and officers are given the opportunity to suggest appropriate scrutiny topics for consideration at that meeting. Topics should then be shortlisted by the OSC using the guidance set out in the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit.

## 7. Officer support to OSC

Officers from democratic services support each OSC through the production of agendas, organisation of meetings (including task and finish groups) and provision of procedural advice and minute taking at every OSC meeting. Chief Officers attend every OSC meeting where matters relating to their work areas are to be discussed, and can provide advice on corporate priorities and work planning. Other officers are invited to attend OSC meetings where their contribution would assist in consideration of particular agenda items.

## Quarter 3 Performance Report 2024/25

<b>Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	13 March 2025
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Transformation and Assurance
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Resources and Transformation

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### 1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise Members on the progress of the Priority Delivery Plans and Council's performance at the end of quarter 3 of 2024-25.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the progress at the end of the third quarter relating to the delivery of the Council's priorities as detailed at Appendices 1a-1d and the performance information set out at Appendix 2.

#### Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.2 The performance information allows Cabinet to monitor progress in delivery of the Council's corporate priorities and operational services.

### 3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The original Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs) for 2024/25, based on the Corporate Plan 2022-26, have been superseded. The revised delivery plans are designed to focus on key strategic and operational priorities.
- 3.2 Overall, 75% of the projects have been delivered or are on schedule to be completed. Progress in delivering the PDPs is summarised in 5.3 of the report and set out in detail in Appendices 1a to 1d.
- 3.3 With regard to the operational performance of the key services of the Council, 72% of targets have been met or exceeded. Further details can be found at 5.6 and in Appendix 2.

### 4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Priority Delivery Plans set out key strategic and operational projects which support the delivery of the Council's priorities.

### 5 Report Detail

#### Background





- 5.1 The Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs) set out in Appendices 1a to 1d to this report are the revised set of plans setting out how the Council will achieve progress against its strategic objectives; these plans establish the actions and timetable for delivery that are the basis of the Council's performance reporting framework.

5.2 In addition to the PDPs, performance is also reported against the delivery of key operational services; Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for these services are set out in Appendix 2.

**Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs)**

5.3 A commentary on performance and a rating for each of the projects/actions set out in the PDPs is given in Appendices 1a-1d. A summary of progress, by rating, is given in the table below.

**Table 1: Summary of progress in delivery of key projects/actions as at end of Quarter 3**

Performance Rating	Action completed	Work on Target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	N/A	Actions due by end of Quarter 3	Action not yet due	Total Number of Actions
Corporate Plan Priority							N/A	
Economic Prosperity	6		5			11	2	13
Health and Wellbeing	5					5	2	7
Community	2	3			1	6	7	13
Responsible Council	10	4	4			18	8	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 (58%)</b>	<b>7 (17%)</b>	<b>9 (23%)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1 (2%)</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>59</b>





5.4 At the end of quarter 3, of the 40 actions planned for delivery in this period:

- 30 (75%) have been completed or are on target to be completed; and;
- 10 (25%) are behind schedule or no longer applicable.

**Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

5.5 In addition to the Delivery Plans, performance is also reported against the delivery of key operational services. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for these services are set out in Appendix 2 and are summarised in Table 2:

Table 2 - Summary of key performance indicators for Quarter 3

Corporate Plan Priority					N/A	Total Number of KPIs
	Performance exceeds target	Performance on target	Performance < 5% below target	Performance > 5% below target	Not Applicable / Annual	
Economy Prosperity	3	1	1	1	1	7
Health & Wellbeing	0	0	0	0	1	1
Community	4	0	3	2	6	15
Community (Housing)	3	12	1	1	7	24
Responsible Council	3	2	2	0	6	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>13 (33%)</b>	<b>15 (39%)</b>	<b>7 (18%)</b>	<b>4 (10%)</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>60</b>

- 5.6 Of the 39 indicators due to be reported on in quarter 3:
- 28 (72%) show performance on or above target; and
  - 11 (28%) show performance below target.

The reasons for underperformance and the corrective action to be taken is set out in Appendix 2.

## 6 Implications

### 6.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report. The financial management of the PDPs is standard in accordance with Financial Regulations and any measure to address a performance shortfall as reflected in a PDP report will require compensatory savings to be identified in the current year and be referred to the budget process for additional resources in future years.

### 6.2 Legal

None

### 6.3 Human Resources

None

### 6.4 Risk Management

The Council's Strategic Risk Register sets out the risks the Council faces in delivering its priorities.

## **6.5 Equalities and Diversity**

Equality and diversity matters are addressed in individual services areas and by undertaking equality impact assessments for projects and programmes of work where this is necessary and appropriate.

## **6.6 Health**

None

## **6.7 Climate Change**

None

## **7 Appendices**

Appendix 1a: Economic Prosperity PDP

Appendix 1b: Health and Wellbeing PDP

Appendix 1c: The Community PDP

Appendix 1d: Responsible Council PDP

Appendix 2: Key Performance Indicators

## **8 Previous Consideration**

None

## **9 Background Papers**

Corporate Plan 2022-26 - Council 27 April 2022

4-Year Delivery Plans 2022-26 - Cabinet 15 September 2022

**Contact Officer:** Judith Aupers

**Telephone Number:** 01543 464 411

**Ward Interest:** All Wards





**Report Track:** Cabinet: 13/03/25

**Key Decision:** No

### Priority Delivery Plan for 2024-25

#### Priority 4 - Responsible Council

#### Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

Quarter					Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	
1&2	8	2			10
3	2	2	4		8
4					8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10 (56%)</b>	<b>4 (22%)</b>	<b>4 (22%)</b>		<b>18 to Q3</b>

#### Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3

The key successes in Quarter 3 include:

- The completion of the accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23 which was a substantial piece of work; and
- The approval of the transformation and digital strategies

#### Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

There has been a delay in finalising the climate change strategy to allow Keele University to review and comment on it before it is brought to Cabinet for approval.

There has been some slippage on the scoping of the transformation work, but this is in progress and is due to be completed in quarter 4.



## Priority 4 - The Council

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
<b>Closure of the Accounts</b>	Closure of the accounts 23/24				X		
	Catch up on closure of previous years accounts			X		The accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23 have been completed	★
<b>Transformation Strategy &amp; Plan</b>	Approval of the Transformation Strategy and Plan		X			The strategy has been approved by Cabinet (28 November 2024)	★
	Brief Senior Management Team on the strategy		X			Completed	★
	Complete scoping work to support development of the Transformation work programme			X		Work has commenced and is due to be completed in quarter 4	▲
	Develop the Transformation work programme				X		
<b>Digital Strategy (inc replacement of IT Systems)</b>	Finalise the digital technology strategy		X			The strategy has been approved by Cabinet (28 November 2024)	★
	Procurement of switches for Infrastructure Upgrade	X				Procurement completed.	★
	Plan for installation of new switches		X			Planning and preparation work is nearly complete. The switches have been configured and the risk assessments for installation completed. Installation due to commence in quarter 4	✓
	Installation of new switches				X		


Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	Identify IT systems in need of replacing over next 3 years		X			Completed - systems have been identified	★
	Assessment and prioritisation of systems to be replaced		X			The list of systems to be replaced has been reviewed and priorities agreed for the next 3 years.	★
	Technology Board to approve systems to be replaced			X		To be discussed and agreed with Leadership Team 21 January 2025	✓
	Project plans will be developed for each system once prioritisation has been agreed and the PDP will be updated accordingly						
<b>Climate Change Strategy</b>	Revised Climate Change Strategy developed and in place			X		There has been a delay to allow Keele University to review and comment on the strategy to ensure a robust approach from the Council. There is an expectation that revisions will be made and the strategy will be then brought to Cabinet.	▲
	Recruitment of staff to support delivery of strategy and monitor operational delivery			X		Recruitment will take place once the strategy is in place.	▲
	New Governance Structure in place to track operational delivery			X		To be completed once the strategy is in place.	▲
<b>Land Charges</b>	Full review of Land Charges Service to include a review of current processes and IT systems		X			Land Charges service review complete. Review of IT systems carried out and recommendations made for replacement system.	★

Project	Actions and Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Progress Update	Symbol
	Transformation of Land Charges scoped and timeline in place to drive this forward			X		Project plan for transformation and new IT system requirements in place.	★
	Procure replacement IT System				X		
	Working towards transformed service				X		
<b>Strategic asset management including the review of key assets</b>	<b>Building Condition Surveys</b>						
	Appoint Interim Building Surveyor		X			Completed	★
	Undertake Building Condition Surveys, including HRA Shops				X		
	<b>Corporate Assets ICT System</b>						
	Research Systems available and draft specification		X			Alternative systems are being explored - 2 systems demos have been completed	✓
	Draft specification for new system				X		
	<b>Insurance Reinstatement Valuations</b>						
	Secure Budget			X		Agreed, subject to business case	✓
Commission Service Provider to complete Valuations				X			

### KPIs for Priority 4 - Responsible Council

Symbol	Description	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	End of Year
	Performance exceeds target	5	3		
	Performance on target	2	2		
	Performance < 5% below target		2		
	Performance > 5% below target				
N/A	Reported Annually / Not Applicable	6	6		
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>		

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
<b>Local Taxation and Benefits</b>									
Days taken to process new HB/CT Claims	27.0	20 days	25.1	18.5	13.2			★	
Days taken to process new HB/CT change of circumstances	6.2	9 days	7.3	3.0	2.9			★	
% of Council Tax collected annually	96.8%	98% by year end	28.0%	54.6	81.6%			✓	
% National non-domestic rates (NNDR) collected	97.3%	98% by year end	26.7%	54.9	80.1%			✓	
<b>Transformation &amp; Assurance</b>									
% of calls answered	88.8%	94%	94%	95.9%	93.6%			▲	Performance has been impacted slightly due to the volume of calls related to the renewal of garden waste permits
Average call wait time	1.55 min	2 min	1.15 min	00.49	01.00			★	Despite the above, the average wait time is well within target
Number of calls answered	New	N/A	20,971	20,716	20,233			N/A	This is not a measure but gives context to the performance in call handling

Indicator	Year End 23/24	Target 24/25	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End 24/25	Rating Symbol	Comments
<b>Law &amp; Governance</b>									
FOI requests within time i.e. 20 working days	88.8%	85%	85%	87%	84.1%				Long term sickness affected performance but should not be a factor in future periods.
<b>Corporate Assets</b>									
% of buildings with a valid annual landlord Gas Safety Record	New	100%						N/A	Not previously reported on - Annual Target
% of buildings with a valid Electrical Certificate (within 5 years)	New	100%						N/A	Not previously reported on - Annual Target
% of passenger lifts that have a valid 6 monthly thorough examination record	New	100%						N/A	Not previously reported on - Annual Target
% of buildings that have a current Legionella risk assessment	New	100%						N/A	Not previously reported on - Annual Target
% of buildings that have a current Fire risk assessment	New	100%						N/A	Not previously reported on - Annual Target