



South Staffordshire Council

# Council Plan 2020 – 2024

*"Shaping South Staffordshire's future"*

## Report of the Leader of the Council

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023

### Introduction and Overview

The Council Plan 2020-2024 sets the Council's vision of "Shaping South Staffordshire's future" and within this prioritises "Prosperous Communities" and "Vibrant Communities".

A number of key performance measures and targets have been set in order to monitor delivery against this vision. These 'hard' measures and targets are monitored and reported through the Council's Integrated Performance Management Report.

This report provides a commentary on matters which are not covered within the Integrated Performance Management Report, but which are nevertheless important activities and developments within each Cabinet area.



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## CORPORATE SERVICES

**Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Roger Lees, Leader**

### 1. Activities and Developments

#### Elections

Local district and parish elections took place on 4 May. The introduction of Voter ID requirements presented additional planning challenges, but a successful and safe election was delivered, ensuring the democratic process was upheld. The Returning Officer has complied with national requirements regarding the completion of statistical returns.

#### Finance

The Finance team is focused on producing the draft Statement of Accounts ahead of Grant Thornton's arrival on site towards the end of June to audit the accounts.

#### Community Safety

The South Staffordshire Community Safety Plan for 2023-2026 has recently launched and brings together all agencies in the district who can have an impact on crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. The Key emphasis of the plan is keeping communities safe is everyone's responsibility and can't be achieved in isolation.

The plans priorities for the 2023-2026 will focus on the high-level priorities:

- Cross Border Crime – focus on vehicle crime
- Serious violence – includes domestic abuse and violence against women and girls
- Anti-social behaviour
- Community Cohesion
- Perception vs Reality

The Community Safety Partnership will work through the Community Safety Partnership governance structure to:

- To reduce all recorded crime by 2%
- To reduce vehicle crime by 2%
- To increase the number of repeat victims of domestic abuse accessing services by 20%
- To reduce serious violence, including domestic abuse and violence against women and girls by 2%
- To reduce anti-social behaviour by 3%
- To maintain the high level of feeling of safety during the day (88%)
- To improve the feeling of safety after dark (67%)



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Over the past 3 years (between April 2019 and March 2022) all crime has seen a reduction of 22% (from 5097 to 3958 recorded crimes) and anti-social behaviour has seen a reduction of 6% (from 1597 to 1498 recorded incidents). These years included COVID-19 lockdowns which will have impacted on crime and anti-social behaviour numbers.

Recently theft of motor vehicles has seen an increase of 35% when comparing May 2022 to May 2023, from 22 to 33 reported crimes. The Community Safety Partnership is reminding drivers to ensure their keyless vehicles are kept secure. The Community Safety Partnership has offered residents the opportunity to collect a free Faraday Bag from the Council offices and will continue to do so over the year.

## BUSINESS ENTERPRISE & COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

**Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Victoria Wilson**

### 1. Activities and developments

#### Council Shortlisted for Royal Town Planning Institute Award

South Staffordshire Council is one of two authorities shortlisted for Planning Authority of the Year for West Midlands. The awards celebrate planning excellence on a national scale and acknowledge the positive contribution that planning professionals make to the communities they serve. The planning team comprises Development Management, Planning Enforcement, Strategic Planning including Local Plans and Housing Strategy. Up against Birmingham City Council, the winners will be announced on 30<sup>th</sup> June at an awards ceremony to be held at Millennium Point.





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## **Local Plan Review**

The review of the Local Plan remains paused awaiting the outcome of the government’s consultation into proposed changes to national planning policy. We are mindful that previous government proposals to change national policy have changed significantly between consultation stages and being finalised. Indications are that it may be late summer/early Autumn before anything is published and we continue to press the government for timescales. However, if significant alterations to the plan, in light of any national changes, are necessary, we will consult on the plan again.

Work continues on the consideration of the representations to the previous consultation and the formulation of responses to the issues raised.

## **Local Plans**

The council’s Annual Monitoring Report for 2022 has now been published online: [amr\\_2022\\_final.pdf \(sstaffs.gov.uk\)](#) The report sets out how we have implemented the Local Plan review timetable (Local Development Scheme); how policies set out in the Local Plan/Core Strategy are being achieved, including performance against housing delivery targets; the progress of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs); progress in relation to neighbourhood planning: Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) proposals, and the steps taken under the Duty to Cooperate (DtC).

Housing land supply annual monitoring is close to being finalised for 2022/2023 and will inform the council’s 5-year housing land supply, which is an important consideration for Members and officers in the determination of planning applications.

## **Kinver Neighbourhood Plan**

The Regulation 16 Consultation for the Kinver Neighbourhood Plan closed on 6 March 2023 and 27 representations were received. These were passed on to the independent Planning Inspector carrying out the Examination into the Neighbourhood Plan under Regulation 17. We have now received the Inspector’s Report for fact checking and once this has been agreed the next stage is for the Neighbourhood Plan to go out to referendum in the parish.

For more information and to view representations and Examination documents visit: [Kinver Neighbourhood Plan South Staffordshire Council \(sstaffs.gov.uk\)](#)

## **Housing Strategy**

Our strong track record of providing affordable homes continues with a total of 156 being completed in South Staffordshire in 2022/23. This includes 71 homes for social rent, and 85 for shared ownership. Most completions were on sites allocated through the Council’s Site Allocations



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Document (SAD) 2018, in the following locations: Bilbrook, Brewood, Cheslyn Hay, Codsall, Featherstone and Wombourne.

## **Warmer Homes**

Our Warmer Homes scheme was nominated for the public health category in the Local Government Chronical Awards 2023. The Warmer Homes scheme aims to reduce cold related illnesses and fuel poverty, as well as providing energy efficient home improvements. To achieve this, we work in partnership with the other Staffordshire and Stoke On Trent local authorities, the charity organisation Beat The Cold, energy provider E.ON, and Broad Oak - a property company. Although not a winner this time round, making it to the final was the result of hard work and dedication by all partners.

Over the past year working with Beat The Cold, the council has received nearly 700 advice line enquires, split almost equally between disadvantaged households with health conditions or residents of old age and vulnerable, and disadvantaged households with benefits. We have helped residents obtain an estimated £92,400. through the household support fund and almost £50K through water tariff savings via bills, discounts, and referral schemes.

## **Development Management**

As part of the recent service review, 2 new posts have been filled in the Development Management Team for a Senior Conservation Officer and Senior compliance Officer.

The service remains fully staffed, reinforcing the council’s employer of choice aspirations, and which bucks the trend nationally as there is a national shortage of planners.

The team is progressing several large housing development site proposals with developers, including the provision of new infrastructure, which is an important issue for members and residents alike. Updates will be provided when planning applications are received and more information is available.

Extensive training is being undertaken with members around the DM process and with the new planning committee following the election of new members and changes to the members who sit on committee.

## **Planning Enforcement**

Planning appeals for two Traveller sites were determined by the Planning Inspectorate in the last quarter. Planning permission was refused for a Travellers’ site on land off Micklewood Lane, Penkridge, however permanent planning permission was granted for a Travellers’ site on land off Teddesley Road, Penkridge. The council is in the process of applying to the High Court to appeal



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the Teddesley Road decision as the decision was not consistent with two recent Traveller site appeal decisions in South Staffordshire.

Compliance monitoring continues for a site in Gospel End in which the applicant lost an appeal against an enforcement notice for unauthorised change of use of land to residential garden land, and the unauthorised importation of large quantities of material to significantly change the ground levels.

## **Enterprise – Business Support**

The Council has launched its UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) prospectus. The prospectus sets out the council's priorities for delivery of the fund up to March 2025. South Staffordshire District Council has been allocated £3.82 million to support revenue schemes and capital projects. An additional allocation of £489,391 Rural England Prosperity Fund will support the rural community and business infrastructure. The prospectus is available to view at [www.sstaffs.gov.uk/uk-shared-prosperity-funding](http://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/uk-shared-prosperity-funding).

The South Staffordshire Business Partnership collaborated with the Stoke and Staffordshire Growth Hub and the Kingswood Trust to host the latest themed networking event, focusing on corporate social responsibility (CSR). Guest speakers included Mark Carnaghan, MD of Eurofins UK Division and Karen Woolley, Federation of Small Businesses Development Manager. Helen Heywood, Kingswood Trust, showcased the amazing facilities at Kingswood Trust, much of which was made possible through the generous support of the local business community and volunteers. Attendees provided excellent feedback, highlighting the strength and importance of the business partnership.

## **Asset Strategy**

Work to deliver the Asset Management Plan continues. Following the completion of a feasibility exercise, the roofing and decarbonisation works at Landywood Enterprise Centre have now been approved. Work will comprise the installation of PV solar panels and LED lighting in addition to roof corrosion protection and decoration of the industrial units. Works are due to be completed during summer 2023.

Following completion of phase one of the redevelopment of Wombourne Enterprise Park, existing tenants have now relocated to their new units at the park. Due to the liquidation of main contractors, a procurement tender exercise is now underway to appoint a new main contractor to complete further phases.



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## REGULATORY SERVICES

**Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Rita Heseltine**

### 1. Activities and developments

#### Food and Safety

Following several visits from officers to the Navigation Pub at Greenforge, where unsatisfactory conditions were repeatedly found, the food business operator has been prohibited from running a food business. The owner pleaded guilty to nine offences contrary to Food Hygiene Regulations and five offences contrary to Health and Safety legislation.

High-risk food was left out overnight and mouldy and out-of-date food was found in the fridges. Officers also reported the incorrect usage of coloured cutting boards contrary to the pub’s own system – presenting a cross-contamination risk.

Rodent droppings were also found in the bar and a putrefied mouse was discovered on a shelf behind the beer pulls. No action had been taken to deal with a long-standing rodent issue at the premises, nor suitable cleaning undertaken of these areas.

Cannock Magistrates stated that some recent improvements had been made but felt that these were far too little too late and that repeated visits had been made by the officers to try to assist him in getting the business up to standard. The magistrates considered there had been a disregard for the advice from the officers, the safety of his staff and customers.

The owner was also ordered to pay fines and costs totalling £7,899.

#### Environmental Protection

Over the past 2 months the team have received 160 complaints. The complaints vary in nature and relate to a wide variety of issues and concerns.

The team are currently continuing to investigate a number of particularly complex issues including a complaint of odour from a commercial premises affecting a neighbouring residential dwelling and a complex drainage issue. Officers are working in conjunction with relevant partner agencies to investigate the cause of the issues and working towards finding resolutions.

#### Licensing

Since January, the team have issued over 200 licences of various types to licensed individuals and businesses in South Staffordshire, including 14 applications for new premises licences. Several of which have been subject to representations/objections and had to be referred to a licensing sub-committee to determine the application.



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## Envirocrime

It’s been a positive start to the financial year with a reduction of 41% on the monthly fly tipping figures compared to April last year. This trend has also continued into May with a reduction of instances of fly tipping for the same period last year, down to 81 from 93.

## April

During April we had a fly tipping case in court where the defendant was fined £80, and the council were awarded £960 costs. One fixed penalty notice (FPN) was issued for littering, which was witnessed by a staff member who provided a statement and photograph. We also issued a FPN for breach of a Community Protection Notice (CPN) order which relates to the tidy up of private land which has been fly tipped and littered over a prolonged period of time.

## May

During May one FPN was issued for a littering offence which was captured on a covert camera. We have also issued 2 Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) to address issues of persistent dog fouling, where the culprit has been identified by the neighbour and reported it to the council.

## **DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY & SERVICE TRANSFORMATION**

### **Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor David Williams**

#### **1. Activities and developments**

##### **Customer Experience Improvement Programme**

Following the launch of the council’s new website in March 2023, the focus of the Customer Experience Improvement Programme has turned to online forms.

The first set of online forms released in May 2023 enable residents to:

- Access and register with a customer portal containing online forms
- Subscribe to the garden waste collection service
- Arrange a bulky waste collection
- View their Council Tax bill and payments



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On average, approximately ten residents per week use the online form to arrange a bulky waste collection.

Further online forms to enable residents to make payments and for reporting issues, such as graffiti, will be released during summer 2023.

## **New laptops for Members**

From September 2022 to March 2023 Members participated in a “Your Council Challenge Panel” on Digital Adoption. The purpose of the Challenge Panel was to consider measures to enable Members to move to be able to fully adopt paperless or paper-lite meetings and associated ways of working.

During the period of the Challenge Panel, Members trialled and assessed several digital devices to support their ways of working. Members identified a clear preference for a Windows 11 laptop, which the Digital Services team have now provided to all Members along with device familiarisation sessions.

## **Cyber security**

Cyber security and the protection of the council’s digital assets, data and services against exploitable vulnerabilities and malicious attacks is a constant consideration. Independent inspection and testing of our cyber security controls and defences is a regular occurrence.

iESE, who awarded the council ‘Council of the Year’ in 2022, have recently established a Cyber Centre of Excellence (CCoE). The CCoE’s mission is to make the UK the safest place to live, work and play in the digital world. One of the actions of the CCoE is an annual assessment of the security of the 382 UK councils.

Publication of the recent CCoE annual assessment ranks South Staffordshire Council as one of the best councils in the UK, in sixth place. Work has already started to address some of the improvements identified in the assessment.



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## WELFARE SERVICES

### Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Robert Reade

#### 1. Activities and developments

##### UK Shared Prosperity Fund

We are launching our People and Skills programme, “Creating Brighter Futures” on the 22 June at Codsall Community hub.

Creating Brighter Futures is delivered through personalised and intensive support by individual caseworkers who will also refer to relevant local training provision, skills and education providers and other specialist support that may be required.

The project promotes the importance of work to help people to live healthier and more independent lives, alongside building future financial resilience, and improving career opportunities.

- Offering a range of support and our experienced staff will help people prepare for work and/or access training.
- Providing 1-2-1 support from a member of our team to work with individuals to identify their needs and consider options for the individual to move forward into work or progress in work.
- We are working in partnership with many local and national employers, training and education providers, volunteering organisations and the DWP (Job Centres)

##### Cost of Living

The Welfare Support team have continued to attend community group events to support those who are struggling with the cost-of-living pressures. Advice is available about discretionary schemes for those who are struggling with payments of rent and Council Tax, as well as signposting and referrals to other organisations for additional support.

##### Housing and Homelessness

There has been a similar number of homeless approaches compared to the same period last year. However, the reasons for these approaches have changed significantly with an increase of more than 130% in the number of young adults approaching for support after been asked to leave the family home by parents/carers. These cases can be difficult to resolve as availability of emergency temporary accommodation for single adults is very limited.

There is continued pressure to support people at risk of homelessness to find available accommodation that is suitable or affordable, either through social housing or privately rented.



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## COMMUNITY SERVICES

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Kath Perry

### 1. Activities and developments

#### Environmental Volunteering

During June, we will be promoting two 'balsam bash' environmental conservation events through the staff volunteering policy. Through the scheme, staff will be encouraged to take up volunteering opportunities across the district, promote our corporate social responsibility and also support our communities.

The 'balsam bash' events will see volunteers remove the invasive species Himalayan Balsam from two council owned sites and help to improve the habitat for native flora. The events will be held at the open space off Tollhouse Way in Wombourne and Jubilee Wood in Bilbrook. Joining staff will be volunteers from Wombourne Parish Council, Wombourne BKV group and the Friends of Bilbrook.

#### Waste & Recycling

During May, we supported delivery of the first of the Council's new webforms; an updated version of the bulky waste booking form, and a new garden waste collection sign up form. These forms include new self-service features allowing residents more control over their bookings and orders without the need to contact us.

We closed Year 3 of the garden waste collection service with over 31,000 subscribers. Year 4 has recently opened and has over 15,000 subscribers as of June 9, 2023.

#### Leisure Services

Funding from the Police & Crime Commissioner has been agreed to continue operating the SPACE scheme across the Council's leisure centres this, Summer. The funding of circa £6k allows for the subsidised access to swimming, gym and 3G pitch activities for 8–17-year-olds for a 4 week period during the school holidays.

Cheslyn Hay Leisure Centre celebrated 45 years of operation on 7<sup>th</sup> June.



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