

TO:- Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Mike Davies , Councillor Philip Davis , Councillor Andrew Adams , Councillor Helen Adams , Councillor Penny Allen , Councillor Jeff Ashley , Councillor Meg Barrow , Councillor Barry Bond M.B.E. , Councillor John Brindle , Councillor Gary Burnett , Councillor Val Chapman , Councillor Bob Cope , Councillor Steph Dufty , Councillor Robert Duncan , Councillor Sue Duncan , Councillor Christopher Evans , Councillor Mark Evans , Councillor Warren Fisher , Councillor Sam Harper-Wallis , Councillor Dr Paul Harrison M.B.E. , Councillor Diane Holmes , Councillor Fiona Hopkins , Councillor Matthew Jackson , Councillor Victor Kelly , Councillor Dan Kinsey B.E.M , Councillor Vincent Merrick , Councillor John Michell , Councillor Rob Nelson , Councillor Martin Perry , Councillor Ray Perry , Councillor Gregory Spruce , Councillor Christopher Steel , Councillor Wendy Sutton , Councillor Sue Szalapski , Councillor Bernard Williams , Councillor Kath Williams

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held as detailed below for the purpose of transacting the business set out below.

Date: Tuesday, 14 November 2023

Time: 18:30

Venue: Council Chamber, Council Offices, Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, South Staffordshire, WV8 1PX



D. Heywood
Chief Executive

AGENDA

Part I – Public Session

- | | | |
|----------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Minutes
To approve the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 26 September 2023. | 1 - 2 |
| 2 | Apologies

To receive any apologies for non-attendance. | |
| 3 | Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of interest. | |
| 4 | Customer Experience Improvement Programme Update
Presentation of the Assistant Director - Business Transformation and Digital Technology | |

5	Customer Experience Report of the Corporate Director - Chief Operating Officer	3 - 18
6	Peer Review Progress Update Report of the Corporate Director - Chief Operating Officer	19 - 34
7	Member Working Groups Update Report of the Member Working Groups Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen	35 - 38
8	Work Programme Report of the Corporate Director of Governance	39 - 42

RECORDING

Please note that this meeting will be recorded.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO AGENDA AND REPORTS

Spare paper copies of committee agenda and reports are no longer available. Therefore should any member of the public wish to view the agenda or report(s) for this meeting, please go to www.sstaffs.gov.uk/council-democracy.

Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** South
Staffordshire Council held in the Council
Chamber Community Hub,
Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, South
Staffordshire, WV8 1PX on Tuesday, 26
September 2023 at 18:30

Present:-

Councillor Andrew Adams, Councillor Helen Adams, Councillor Penny Allen, Councillor Jeff Ashley, Councillor Meg Barrow, Councillor John Brindle, Councillor Gary Burnett, Councillor Bob Cope, Councillor Mike Davies, Councillor Philip Davis, Councillor Steph Dufty, Councillor Robert Duncan, Councillor Sue Duncan, Councillor Christopher Evans, Councillor Mark Evans, Councillor Sam Harper-Wallis, Councillor Dr Paul Harrison, Councillor Fiona Hopkins, Councillor Victor Kelly, Councillor Dan Kinsey, Councillor Vincent Merrick, Councillor John Michell, Councillor Rob Nelson, Councillor Martin Perry, Councillor Ray Perry, Councillor Gregory Spruce, Councillor Christopher Steel, Councillor Wendy Sutton, Councillor Sue Szalapski, Councillor Bernard Williams, Councillor Kath Williams

11 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 25.7.23

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 July 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Bond MBE, V Chapman and M Jackson.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14 THE COUNCIL'S MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 - 2028/29 AND 2024/25 BUDGET OUTLOOK AND INDICATIVE FIGURES

The Committee received a report from the Finance Team Manager (and Interim 151 Officer).

RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (a) note the broad economic and external climate that could precipitate the best, worst and likeliest scenarios presented.

(b) note the potential impact of identified and provisionally costed external factors on the General Funds of the Council, notwithstanding that these are indicative and internal policy prioritisation remains ongoing.

15 MEMBERS UPDATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIONS

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director, Place and Communities updating members on progress made on the council's work to mitigate the effects of climate change during 2022-23 and provide a brief update on actions and work that will take place

during 2023-24.

RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the reported progress and achievements made during 2022-23, and the proposals for 2023-24.

16

WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The Committee received the report of the Corporate Director of Governance updating the work programme for the Committee for the municipal year 2023-24.

RESOLVED: The the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the work programme for the municipal year 2023-24.

The Meeting ended at: 19:45

CHAIRMAN

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 NOVEMBER 2023

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE – ‘OUR CUSTOMER PROMISE TO YOU’

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER AND
CORPORATE SUPPORT TEAM MEMBER**

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR ROGER LEES, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report presents a newly produced ‘Our Customer Promise to You’ policy document that captures the customer experience.

2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	Customers are at the heart of all we do. Our ‘Customer Promise’ aims to fulfil our ambition to make everyone’s experience of contacting the Council a positive one, whether it is a resident, business, partner, or supplier.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (Equal) been completed?	
	No	EQIA’s will be completed as and when work produced by individual services require one.
	Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been completed?	
	No	
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	No	This policy will be presented to the Standards and Resources committee on the 23 November 2023.
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	To be confirmed and will be at the same time as the Customer Feedback Policy.	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	Yes/No	No immediate financial impact
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes/No	No Legal implications

OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES including climate impacts and health impacts if applicable	None	
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	This policy will involve all our customers that contact us.

PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

- 3.1 Earlier in the year, every service developed service charters that set out the vision, mission statement, customer promise and how customers can help the service. During the summer, we invited residents to join us for a focus group to discuss a few of the charters from the high contact areas.
- 3.2 One of our key outcomes from the focus groups was that the documents would work best as internal documents as the information wasn't all relevant/easily understood. They shared that they wanted just one document that clearly set out what they can expect when they contact us. Following the focus group session, we have produced a new customer experience policy, attached, that we are calling, 'Our Customer Promise to You'.
- 3.3 The service charters will be used as internal documents and 'Our Customer Promise to You' will be the external facing document for customers.
- 3.4 'Our Customer Promise to You' has been developed using our five core values: Trust, Transparency, Listening, Positive Relationships and Pride. Our ambition is to make everyone's experience of contacting the Council a positive one, whether you are a resident, business, partner, or supplier. Our vision is that our customers are at the heart of everything we do.
- 3.5 The policy sets out what customers can expect when they get in touch with us, how we will keep them informed, how we will work together and how customers can help us. It also includes our vision for Equality and Diversity and links to our 'Everyone Count's document. The document will be set by graphics ahead of Cabinet Weekly Briefing.
- 3.6 'Our Customer Promise to You' will be launched alongside the updated Customer Feedback Policy and we will:
- Develop and launch a rolling training and development programme with Customer Services which will include looking at the induction programme for new starters.

- Develop a communication plan.
- Provide feedback to the focus group via a “You said, we did” approach.
- Work with services so key information from the service standards are included on the website on individual pages.
- Include a customer experience section in the Integrated Performance Management Framework that will pull data together on a quarterly basis.
- Explore different ways of working together with our customers to capture their experiences, for example mystery shoppers and focus groups.

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4.1 Further details of any impacts as necessary.

N/A

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

5.1 None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 The proposed ‘Our Customer Promise to You’ policy document is attached to this report.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That Members consider the ‘Our Customer Promise to You’ and note the recommendations for roll out.

Report prepared by: Rebecca Harris, Corporate Support Team Manager



South Staffordshire Council

Our Customer Promise to You



www.sstaffs.gov.uk



Our Customer Promise to You

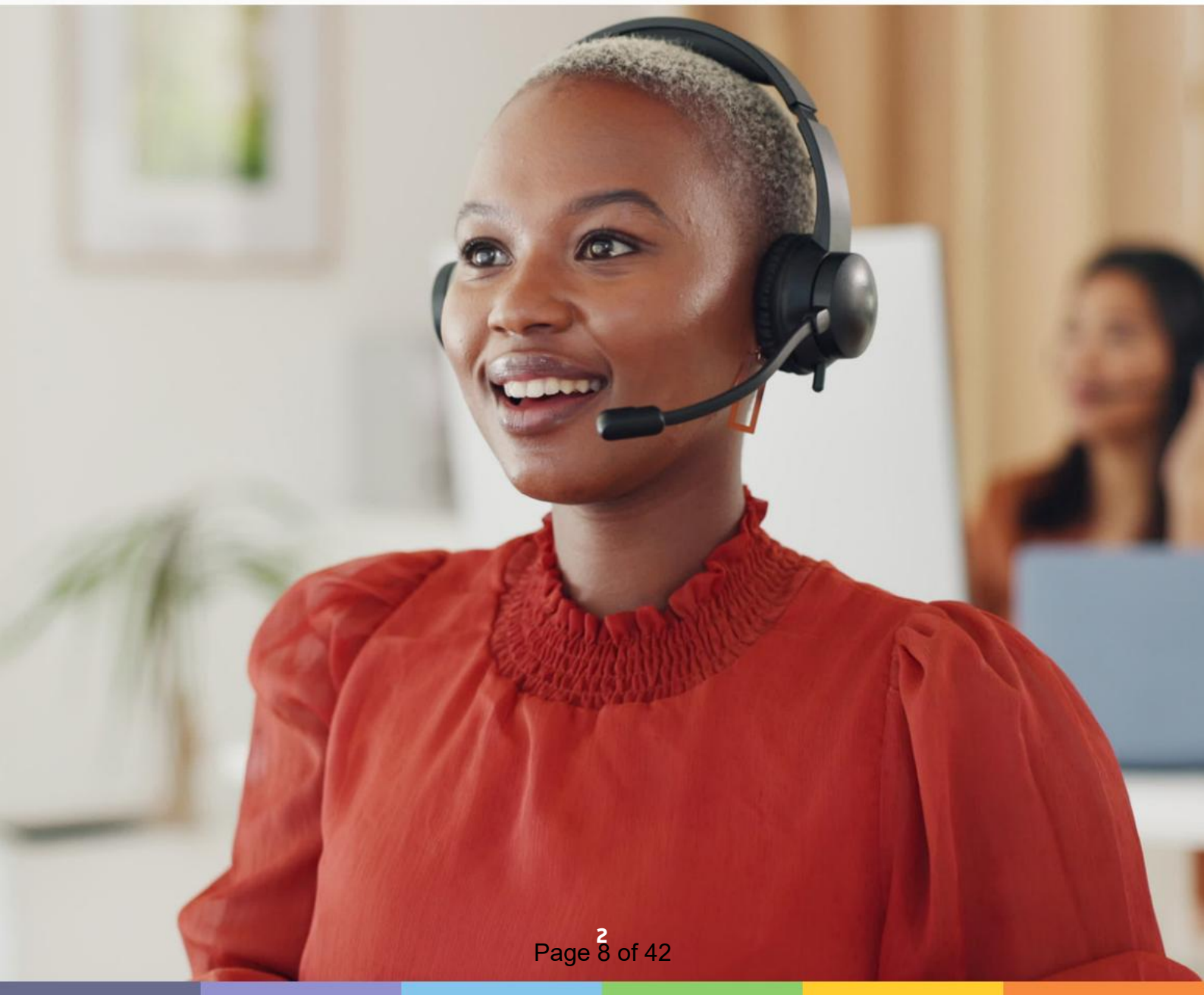
INTRODUCTION

Our 'Customer Promise' aims to fulfil our ambition to make everyone's experience of contacting the Council a positive one, whether you are a resident, business, partner, or supplier.

Your customer experience should always be simple and convenient no matter who you are contacting and how you are contacting us.

Our staff will put you at the heart of all they do and are committed to fulfilling our promise to you.

To help us to achieve our promise we have recently launched our 'Customer Feedback Policy' to capture comments, compliments, and complaints. We encourage you to feedback to us on your customer experience so we can reshape and enhance our services.



Our Customer Promise to You

OUR CUSTOMER PROMISE TO YOU

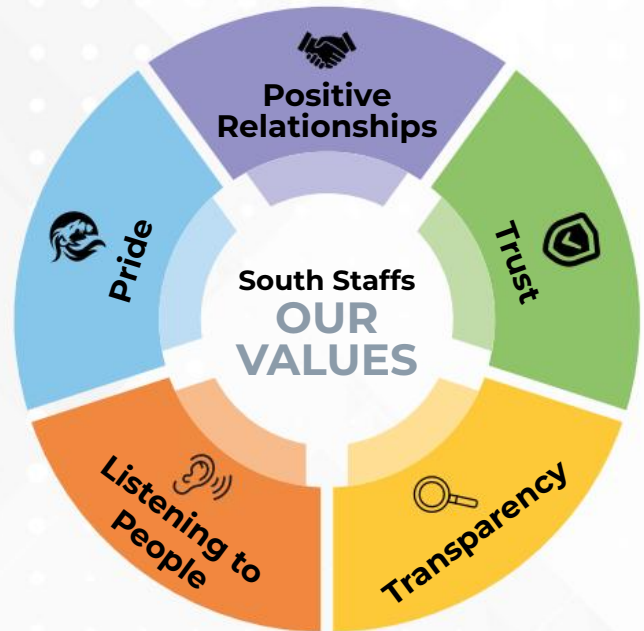
Our Vision

Our customers: at the heart of everything we do.

Our Values

Our 'Customer Promise' is driven by our five core values:

Trust, Transparency, Listening, Positive Relationships and Pride.



Our Values	We will...
Trust	Always be there when you need us.
Transparency	Be clear, open and honest when communicating with you.
Listening	Listen and consider all feedback you provide to us.
Positive relationships	Be friendly, professional and welcoming and always treat you with respect.
Pride	Go the extra mile in delivering your customer experience

Our Customer Promise to You

WE WILL BE THERE FOR YOU...

- If you call us, we aim to answer your call within 10 minutes. When we experience a high demand on our services, we aim to answer within 15 minutes.
- If you contact us via email or social media, you will receive a response within 3 working days and an acknowledgement within 1 working day.
- You will be greeted in a friendly, professional, and welcoming way.
- Our core services are available weekdays 9am - 5pm except for Wednesdays when we open 10am - 5pm due to Customer Services staff training.
- We will provide all the information you need to self-serve on our website, which is available all day, every day.
- If you want to find more information about a specific service for example how long a planning application will take, or how to register to vote, this will be available on our website.
- We will always aim to resolve your query at the first point of contact. If this isn't possible, we will signpost to the relevant partner.
- Your information will be handled sensitively and securely. We will treat it like it is our own - only collecting and storing if relevant where we need to.
- Our staff will receive regular training and development on 'Our Customer Promise'.



Our Customer Promise to You

KEEPING YOU INFORMED...

- When you contact us, we will let you know when you can expect an answer.
- If something is going to take longer than expected, we will let you know and provide an update as soon as possible.
- We will celebrate and showcase success across the whole Council.
- We have a variety of e-communication services you can join to keep informed with the latest news. Sign up to our e-communication services [here](#) and follow us on social media.



Our Customer Promise to You

WORKING TOGETHER...

- We will listen to you so we understand your point of view and will acknowledge your concerns.
- We will apologise if we get it wrong and learn from our mistakes.
- We will use your feedback to continuously improve our services, capturing key anonymised information that we will use when planning our services.
- We will let you know of any changes to the way we operate and may seek your views on new ways of working.



Our Customer Promise to You

HOW YOU CAN HELP US...

- Treat us with respect and understand we will not tolerate abusive language or threatening behaviour.
- Provide all the information we need to best help you.
- Create a 'My Login' account [here](#) to report issues directly to us and access a range of service – anytime, anywhere.
- Complete our surveys when we send them out including the annual Residents' Survey, available on our website every Autumn.
- Provide us with feedback [here](#) so we can improve our services.



Our Customer Promise to You

WHO DOES WHAT

Local Government in South Staffordshire

In South Staffordshire we have three forms of local government, the **District Council i.e. South Staffordshire Council, Staffordshire County Council** and **27 Parishes**.

Below are the services which each of the three tiers of local government provide – i.e. Staffordshire County Council as the County Council, this Council as the District Council and the Parish Councils.

Services provided by South Staffordshire Council

Digital Technology and Business Transformation

- Digital Services
- Business Change
- Business Transformation Programme
- Customer Experience Improvement Programme
- Procurement

Welfare

- Revenues (Council Tax & Business Rates)
- Benefits & Welfare Support
- Housing Options & Homelessness
- Safeguarding
- People and Skills – Creating Brighter Futures
- Asylum & Refugee Support

Human Resources

- Revenues (Council Tax & Business Rates)
- Benefits & Welfare Support
- Housing Options & Homelessness
- Safeguarding
- People and Skills – Creating Brighter Futures
- Asylum & Refugee Support

Commercial Assets and Estates

- Hinksford Park
- Commercial Properties and Assets
- Facilities Management
- Property/assets
- Commercial investment projects
- Land Sales

Community

- Waste Management and Customer Support
- Street Scene
- Emergency Planning and Business Continuity (Operational)
- Leisure Services
- Environmental Health and Licensing
- Community Safety
- Strategic Health Link
- Climate Change Service Operational Lead

Planning, Enterprise and Growth

- Planning Policy (includes Local Plans Team)
- Strategic Housing
- Delivery of strategic employment Sites & inward investment (Future growth)
- Business Infrastructure, Support and Growth (Includes Enterprise Team)
- Business Insight
- Building Control and Land Charges Partnership
- Development Management
- Planning Enforcement

Partnership

- Locality Programme
- Opportunities in our communities
- Electoral services
- Strategic partnerships
- Communications
- District Data/ Intelligence

Our Customer Promise to You

Services provided by the County Council and Parish Councils



- Adult social care
- Blue badges (new and renewal)
- Bus passes
- Children services
- Education
- Footpaths
- Highways maintenance (including potholes), road closures and diversions
- Household recycling centres
- Libraries
- Parking - on street
- Public transport
- Registration of births, deaths and marriages
- Street lighting
- Trading standards
- Weather related issues
- Waste disposal management (not collection)

Contact details for elected members of Staffordshire County Council can be found [here](#).

Parish Councils

- Allotments
- Bus shelters
- Community centres
- Play areas and play equipment
- War memorials

Our Customer Promise to You

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION – ‘EVERYONE COUNTS’

South Staffordshire Council is an inclusive and open council that collaborates with residents, businesses, partners, and employees to build communities that are great places to live, visit and work.

We are working hard to shape our services to ensure that communities can access the services and support they need and that we actively promote and practice equality, diversity, and inclusion to ensure we achieve equity and a sense of belonging for our communities and our workforce.

The council has a vision for Equality and Diversity which is set out in South Staffordshire’s Equality and Diversity Narrative ‘Everyone Counts’ for a society that:

- Improves quality of life by removing discrimination.
- Builds strong cohesive communities.
- Acknowledges that diversity enhances the lives of all who live, work and travel to the area.

To find out more about how we are tackling inequality, take a look at our **‘Everyone Counts’** narrative.



Our Customer Promise to You

HOW TO CONTACT US

Our website sets out the various ways you can [contact us](#).



South Staffordshire Council
www.sstaffs.gov.uk

Council Offices
Codsall
South Staffordshire
WV8 1PX
Tel: **01902 696000**

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 NOVEMBER 2023

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REVIEW UPDATE
REPORT**

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR ROGER LEES – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 To update Members on the Peer review progress meeting feedback from the Local Government Association peer review team.

2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	The overall view of the Council and how it operates underpins service delivery against the Council Plan.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (Equal) been completed?	
	No	This is a feedback report and therefore does not require an EqIA to be completed.
	Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been completed?	
	No	This is a feedback report and therefore does not require a Data Protection Impact Assessment to be completed.
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	Yes	The Local Government Association Peer Review feedback report will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 14 November 2023.
KEY DECISION	Yes/No	No
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE		
FINANCIAL IMPACT	No	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any financial impacts of agreed actions would be addressed within specific projects/budgets as necessary.
LEGAL ISSUES	No	There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES including climate impacts and health impacts if applicable	Any agreed actions would build on the strong position of the Council and further the high levels of service delivery achieved.	
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	

PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

- 3.1 As part of the Corporate Peer Review in October 2022, a progress and follow up review was agreed to take place 10 months following the review.
- 3.2 The Progress review meeting was held 21 July 2023 with representatives from the original peer review team in attendance.
- 3.3 The purpose of the review meeting is to: -
- a. Update peers on the early progress made and to receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations.
 - b. Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were onsite including any further support needs.
 - c. Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.
- 3.4 Appendix 1 is the feedback report which acknowledges "the Council has taken onboard the feedback from the peers and is progressing well against its action plan."
- 3.5 The report highlights information from the discussion and further thoughts from the peer review team relating to The Customer and Outcomes, Finance and Commercial Activity, Member and Officer working and, Capacity and continuous improvement.
- 3.6 The Corporate Leadership Team continue to oversee the implementation of the action plan and have concluded a significant number of the actions including: -
- Reviewed capacity for project delivery in particular the Customer experience programme.
 - Maintaining the focus on the evolution programme.
 - Taking a commercial approach across the range of business-as-usual services.
 - Profiling of Capital schemes.
 - Engage in visiting and learning from other councils.
 - Ensure staff continue to have the platforms and networks to connect across the organisation.
 - Review and plan for reduced financial reliance on reserves.
 - Review to ensure Audit and Risk Committee is strengthened.

3.7 The remaining areas of focus include: -

- Concluding the service standards and Charter.
- Implementing an operation digital dashboard.
- Employer of choice metrics -quarterly reviewed.
- Locality and partner action plan to be finalised based on data.
- Explore opportunities to gain immediate customer feedback.
- Commercial and transactional investment kept under review.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4.1 Not applicable.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

5.1 Not applicable

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Local Government Association Peer Challenge – Progress Review report

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Members to note the content of the Peer Review Progress Report

Report prepared by: Jackie Smith, Corporate Director, Chief Operating Officer

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

South Staffordshire District Council
Feedback

21st July 2023





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1. Introduction

South Staffordshire District Council (SSDC) undertook a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during October 2022 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the CPC. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Update peers on the early progress made and to receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns to the CPC's recommendations
- Consider peer's reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank SSDC for its commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review took place on 21st July 2023.

The Review focused on the key recommendations made by the peer team as part of the CPC and the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Duncan McGinty, LGA Peer and former Leader of Sedgemoor District Council
- Rob Mitchell, Chief Executive - Charnwood Borough Council
- Francesca Stott, National Adviser – Local Government Association
- James Millington, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

The peer team met with the following colleagues at SSDC:

- Cllr Roger Lees, Leader
- Dave Heywood, Chief Executive
- Jackie Smith, Corporate Director Communities and Wellbeing
- Annette Roberts, Corporate Director Infrastructure and Business Growth
- Lorraine Fowkes, Director Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)
- Clodagh Peterson – Assistant Director Partnerships Policy & Partnerships

Ahead of this Progress Review the council shared an updated CPC recommendations action plan and key documents as background for the discussions.

3. Progress Review – Feedback

The peer team heard how the CPC has been valuable to the council for building on the strong foundations already in place, and reflecting on areas for further improvement. SSDC's response since the CPC has been to place an emphasis on taking the council to the 'next level'. The peer team and the council acknowledge this can be challenging due to the nature of making incremental improvements but the peer team were impressed with how SSDC is striving to continue to move to excellence. It was clear from the Progress Review that SSDC has taken onboard the feedback from the peers and is progressing well against its action plan.

The session focused on discussions around the key recommendations made as part of the CPC and this report outlines these in themes, as below. This is not intended to capture the details of all of the discussions but provide an overview of progress since the CPC in October 2022.

The Customer and Outcomes

A key recommendation made in the CPC related to the development of a consistent approach to setting service standards, mapping customer journeys and measuring

satisfaction to support SSDC's further improvement. The peer team considered this to be an important component in SSDC achieving its ambitions. Since the CPC, SSDC has focused on developing Service Standards in areas across the council including in Welfare Services, Enterprise Services and Planning Services. To do this the council has built upon the existing 'pinch point' exercise undertaken by its Assistant Directors - which produces an overview of anticipated activity in addition to business as usual, so SSDC can identify issues and mitigate the impact. Considerations around equalities and inclusion, locality needs and community engagement plans were factored into this process.

SSDC has reviewed its Customer Feedback policy and has included the council's expected response standards to digital communications as well as more traditional routes, including handwritten correspondence. The policy now recognises the extent of different channels which individuals communicate with SSDC and the organisation's expected approach to making a response. The peer team agreed this was good progress and discussed the potential for gaining immediate customer satisfaction feedback from callers to SSDC's call centre – and the council confirmed there are plans to develop this in future as part of its ongoing approach to utilising feedback.

The council is developing a Community Engagement Plan to ensure it is engaging with communities on a coordinated and planned basis rather than from individual service areas. As part of its approach SSDC has been using its Aspire staff development programme where programme participants have a project this year to develop guidance and a toolkit for council managers on community engagement. This complements the council's Locality model to ensure the council is inclusive and all the representatives of the community are able to engage with it.

During the CPC the team raised concerns about the timescales around the Customer Experience Improvement Programme, making a recommendation for SSDC to consider its capacity to deliver this and to clarify outcomes. The peer team was impressed that SSDC had completed the refresh of the website by March 2023 and

this was delivered on time and budget. As part of this SSDC ensured that the content was updated and importantly that it was more accessible and inclusive for all users. This included SSDC testing that the website could be understood by a 9 year old reader – by having a group of 9 year olds provide feedback to shape the content and navigation of the website. SSDC confirmed that key outcomes for the Programme are to ensure that individuals can transact with the council in ways which suit them – there is a strong emphasis from Members that the website will enable digital transactions but that this is not the only option available. There has been early success in this digital approach, for example in issuing the garden waste permits more than 90% of customers were happy to complete this online. The peer team heard how the next phase of the Programme will build on this, making the website increasingly more transactional for customers. Council service areas are currently identifying the high volume customer areas to help inform the next stage of this two year Programme. The new online forms will also include some community engagement to test and challenge the approach. The peer team agree this staging is right and the longer term Programme makes sense to roll-out incrementally. The group discussed how the council will want to ensure it retains the balance between good customer interaction which it is so passionate about alongside transaction options via the website for services.

Since the CPC SSDC has also reviewed its wider approach to customer interactions, which was an important area for Members. This includes the council's Contact Centre which has been restructured to target the high volume areas – including the welfare services and frontline environmental services, establishing teams dedicated to support these areas and their customer interactions. This was established in March 2023, with SSDC recruiting staff into these roles. SSDC will be testing and reviewing the outcomes of this approach during this first year.

The group discussed the recommendation made around the role of the operational performance dashboard and consistency and quality of service provision. The council confirmed how the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) reviews the dashboard to challenge performance and also uses this as a basis for committing resources.

For example, the peer team heard how performance in the Welfare Advice Service had been impacted by an increase in demand due to cost of living and the dashboard allowed CLT to spot this and commit additional resources and engage a third party to support improvement. This investment improved performance, bringing the service back within performance targets. The dashboard has been utilised to monitor and respond to developments in Leisure – monitoring the membership figures following a £3M leisure centre refurbishment programme as well as allowing the council to monitor debtors and creditors, and make decisions about investing in this service.

The dashboard will be kept under review to be flexible, respond to issues and support SSDC's approach in being flexible in its use of resources. The peer team were pleased to hear how the dashboard was supporting the council and the use of operational indicators was allowing CLT to respond as needed. The group also discussed how as part of its IT programme SSDC will consider the value in using software to help automate performance monitoring in future.

Finance and Commercial Activity

In the CPC feedback to the council in October the peer team noted that '*the council has strong financial management and this is reflected in both its financial reporting and level of reserves*'. Notwithstanding the challenges facing other councils, including significant pay and inflationary pressures, during the course of this Progress Review the peer team heard that the council remains in a strong position and the provisional outturn (subject to audit) indicates a draw on General Fund reserves of £0.623M - which is £0.427M better than originally budgeted. SSDC will still be utilising reserves in 2022/23 but the position has improved compared to previously.

SSDC continues to operate its Resource Planning and Prioritisation process and is currently anticipating achieving a balanced 5 year MTFS. The council was anticipating utilising a managed use of reserves of £1.7M in 2023/24 but this is now expected to reduce due to a combination of over performing investments and

favourable interest rates. In subsequent years SSDC is anticipating having a balanced budget without utilising reserves. Savings and efficiencies remain part of its approach and Cabinet and CLT discussed this in June and will be working through savings and investments in mid-September with the wider Member group. Efficiencies could in part be delivered through the investments the council has already made in digital.

Following the CPC the peer team recommended that SSDC consider how its commercial approach was being adopted across its business as usual, contract management and income recovery functions. SSDC is addressing this through a restructure of CLT and recent appointment to a new Assistant Director with a remit for maximising the council's commercial and estates programme. The council has also invested in the capacity within its transactional services to manage the creditors and the debtors, to maximise income for SSDC. The peer team consider these steps to be important for this recommendation - committing resources to ensure that it has the capacity to deliver on its ambitions - and recommend keeping the outcomes of this under review.

SSDC was allocated £3.8M in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and is using this to deliver on its ambitions, building on areas which it is strong including growing businesses and supporting communities. For example, this will include a skills programme linked into local communities and businesses. The council has linked these priorities to that of its strategic partners to support the delivery within the District. An Assistant Director role will drive the UKSPF and its associated governance.

In the CPC report the peer team identified the need to consider SSDC's capacity needs. It is clear that the council has considered this and reviewed - bringing in additional capacity to deliver its priorities through the assistant directors roles.

The group discussed challenges being faced by councils in the current context and

that the appropriate consideration of risk will remain important. The group discussed how SSDC's approach is cautious and the council does not register anything in the MTFS which is not achievable. For example, there are some significant developments including West Midlands Interchange, Logic 54 and i54 where SSDC has a level of certainty on generating a good financial return in 2027. SSDC remains mindful of the challenges but remains in a relatively secure position currently with the business rates position.

Member and Officer working

The focus the council has on maintaining the positive working and relations between Members and officers continues - and this remains important to SSDC. Following the all-out elections in May 2023 there were 17 newly elected Members and together with an ongoing support programme all new Members met with the CEX and the Monitoring Officer (MO). The CEX and MO have also met with all 42 Members of SSDC to understand their ambitions and priorities for their term in office. Sessions have also included a discussion with CLT and Members to provide an overview of how the council operates and SSDC's priorities, and a wider Member session was held with the Extended Leadership Team and team managers to build relationships with all Members.

The council undertakes Ward Walks with a member of CLT and relevant ward Members to engage at a local level. These have emphasised the communities within the District and how communities relate strongly with their villages. Building on this SSDC will continue to build on these relationships for officers, Members and the wider community and groups to work together through its 'Community is the Best Medicine' Programme.

The peer team considered this approach to building relationships with new Members and officers to be further evidence of how SSDC is investing in the good, strong relationships observed during the CPC to deliver improved outcomes for communities.

Capacity and continuous improvement

The peer team heard how SSDC continues to focus on improvement, using the findings of the CPC to provide opportunities to support this. A good example of this is how SSDC has continued review itself as an 'employer of choice' and build on its offer. During the CPC the peer team acknowledged this was already a particularly strong area for the council, and heard how the council is extending its approach. The approach SSDC has taken is focused on attracting new staff as well as nurturing and retaining existing officers. SSDC has gathered together a range of measures to ensure it keeps an overview on this and this includes: analysing the regular staff surveys and wellbeing surveys; reviewing the outcomes of interviews, including the acceptance rate and number of vacancies not filled; considering how successful SSDC is at attracting interviewees - particularly in the harder to recruit to professions; and undertaking exit interviews. SSDC has also increased its focus on work experience students and made a pledge to provide an ongoing relationship following the placement to consider a career in local government and a future at SSDC. This has been developed since the CPC to build on its existing good practice. Staff surveys are well embedded and the council is now building up more comprehensive picture bringing together the above measures which has not been collated in this way previously before. The peer team consider this to be good practice in SSDC, as it is identifying how its use of this data can move it to the next level.

A CPC recommendation was to maintain the focus on SSDC's Evolution Programme. SSDC has been advancing its thinking and moving this forward, now discussing widely with staff. The 'One Team, One Council' remains important but the Programme will be built upon so that SSDC will be 'Small, Nimble and Connected': Small enough to care but big enough to make a difference; nimble enough to remain flexible to respond to the challenges quickly; and connected through the growing digital programme.

The peer team discussed how SSDC will remain focused on how to continually challenge itself and measure progress. CLT and Cabinet are currently developing

the council's priorities for the next 4 years and aligned to this is the importance of measuring the impact of its delivery. The peer team heard how SSDC has updated its place narrative and is shortly to undertake a second round of consultation, working with Members. The development of SSDC's 2024-2028 Council Plan will ensure the future focus of the organisation. To support this the council has developed four key measures so it will know it is delivering successfully:

1. **'Our residents tell us'** – 90% would recommend South Staffordshire as a place to live. SSDC recognises that this outcome is a combination of the council and other stakeholders, including the County Council and communities - but this will be good barometer for the place overall.
2. **'Our staff will tell us'** – 93% recommend the council as a place to work. The next staff survey will be issued in September. This measure is strongly linked to being an employer of choice and important to the council's workforce plans.
3. **'Our performance tells us'** – Consistently meeting Council Plan targets. These performance targets will be monitored by CLT and allows it to review and update, depending on the focus.
4. **'Our Peers tell us'** – This includes the outcome of the CPC. Additionally, in July 2023 SSDC hosted iESE and a number of other councils over 2 days for inter-organisational learning. SSDC shared its work on the community engagement programme, Community Hub and the locality business hubs. The council also sees the value of awards in raising its profile as an employer particularly for attracting new staff and retaining and motivating current staff but also as part of the check and challenge in comparing the council with other areas.

The group discussed how SSDC continues to challenge itself externally and the desire to not '*rest on its laurels*' was a theme picked up in the CPC. Since the CPC this external challenge and recognition has included: being awarded the Regional Planning Authority of the Year for the West Midlands by the Royal Town Planning Institute; shortlisted for the APSE Street Cleansing and Street scene Service; two SSDC apprentices shortlisted for IT & Digital Apprenticeship of the year award – City

of Wolverhampton College Apprenticeship Awards 2023 with one the eventual overall winner; and the CEX shortlisted for Municipal Journal Chief Executive of the Year.

However, SSDC remains mindful of the ongoing challenges. These include SSDC's Local Plan which has been paused until new national guidelines on housing numbers have been published; pressures from refugee schemes and housing demands; ongoing economic factors including inflation and the cost of living pressures; pressures facing contractors and their viability; and the external legislative challenges such as the Environment Act. CLT and Cabinet continue to discuss these to ensure the council is responding to challenges and putting mitigations in place where necessary.

5. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank SSDC for undertaking an LGA CPC progress review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Helen Murray (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA) and their e-mail address is helen.murray@local.gov.uk.

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – 14 NOVEMBER 2023****UPDATE ON MEMBER WORKING GROUPS 2023/24****REPORT OF THE MEMBER WORKING GROUPS CHAIRMEN AND VICE-CHAIRMEN****PART A – SUMMARY REPORT****1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 To update members on the work undertaken at each of the three Member Working Groups for 2023/24.

2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	The Member Working Groups actions plans and outcomes contribute to the overall progress of the Council Plan and objectives.
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (Equal) been completed?	
	No	For information report
	Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been completed?	
	No	For information report
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	No	Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	March 2024	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	No	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any financial implications arising from the recommendations of the Member Working Groups will be addressed as part of those recommendations.
LEGAL ISSUES	No	There are no legal implications arising from this report. Any legal implications arising from the recommendations of the Member Working Groups will be addressed as part of those recommendations.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES including climate impacts and health impacts if applicable	No	
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	None	

PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Member Working Groups were introduced in 2023 to replace the former Challenge Panels that had been operating for a number of years. The Member Working Groups are informal meetings providing an opportunity for every member to scrutinise particular matters in significant detail on an annual basis. The topics for the Groups were agreed by Members on 25 July 2023.

3.2 Member Working Group – Climate Change

This Group is looking at ‘carbon neutral – what it really means for the council’. The first meeting was held on 4 October and Councillor Dan Kinsey BEM was elected Chairman with Councillor Gary Burnett as Vice-Chairman. The scope was agreed and a number of immediate actions agreed to enable the work of the group to progress including inviting representatives from other organisations to attend to share ‘green principles’ and understanding the costs involved and potential funding opportunities. The group is next due to meet on 6 November (after production of this report) and a verbal update can be provided as necessary.

3.3 Member Working Group – Community Engagement

This Group is looking at building on examples of good practice locally with regard to community engagement. The first meeting was held on 2 October and Councillor Andy Adams was elected Chairman with Councillor Christopher Evans as Vice-Chairman. The scope was agreed and it was acknowledged that it is about strengthening what is already working well, looking to share best practice with County and Parish Councils. The group is next due to meet on 6 November and receive a presentation from the Council’s Aspire Group on the Community Engagement Tool.

3.4 Member Working Group – Council Plan 2024/2028

This Group is working on proposals for the next Council Plan. The first meeting was held on 9 October and Councillor Martin Perry was elected Chairman with Councillor Bob Cope as Vice-Chairman. The scope was agreed and members inputted into the draft residents survey. The group met for a second time on 30 October reviewing the current Council Plan to help shape the new Council Plan, looking at the Place Narrative and the Locality Profiles. The next meeting will be held on 13 November.

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 4.1 N/A

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 5.1 N/A

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 N/A

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Members note the progress to date of the Member Working Groups.

Report prepared by: Lorraine Fowkes – Corporate Director of Governance

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 NOVEMBER 2023****WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE****PART A – SUMMARY REPORT****1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 This report updates members in respect of the work programme for the Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/24.

2. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	Scrutiny is key to the effective and efficient operation of the Council to enable delivery against the Council Plan
	Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) been completed?	
	No	No – not needed as any equality issues would be addressed individually rather than as part of the programme setting
SCRUTINY POWERS APPLICABLE	No – this report goes to Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
KEY DECISION	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	2023/24 Municipal Year	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	No	This is within existing budgets
LEGAL ISSUES	No	No specific legal issues from this report
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	No	None at this stage as setting the programme of work rather than considering individual items
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	

PART B – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

3.1 At its meeting on 25 July 2023, the Committee agreed a work programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year. This report updates the agreed programme.

3.2 In addition to the programmed work there will, from time to time, be a number of additional items coming to the Committee including:

- Councillor call for action
- Councillor “call ins”
- Key decision reports

This may require additional meetings to be programmed in depending on when the issues arise.

3.3 Any suggestions for additions to the work programme should be referred to the Chairman in the first instance.

3.4 Work Programme 2023/24

25 July 2023

- Setting of work programme -COMPLETED
- UKSPF Report - COMPLETED
- Integrated Performance Management outturn for 2022/23 - COMPLETED
- Member Working Groups – Topic Selection - COMPLETED
- Challenge Panels Final Outcomes Report 2022/23 - COMPLETED
- Closed Churchyards Special Expense – Voluntary Referral of Member Decision - COMPLETED
- Place Narrative Findings - COMPLETED

26 September 2023

- Work programme update – COMPLETED
- Climate Change Action Plan Update – COMPLETED
- Peer Review Follow-up outcome – deferred to November meeting
- Resource Planning and Prioritisation (RPP) 2024 – COMPLETED
- Service Standards – deferred to November meeting

14 November 2023

- Work programme update – ON AGENDA
- Member Working Groups Update – ON AGENDA

- Integrated Performance Management Report Q2 – deferred to future meeting
- Staffordshire County Council Highways – Potholes – understanding the position - deferred to March meeting
- Customer Programme/Digital Programme update – ON AGENDA
- Service Standards – renamed Customer Experience – ON AGENDA
- Peer Review Follow-up outcome – ON AGENDA

23 January 2024

- Work programme update
- Budget meeting
- Member Working Groups Update
- UK Shared Prosperity Update Report
- DFG's update report
- Local Plan

12 March 2024

- Work programme update
- Staffordshire County Council Highways – Potholes – understanding the position – deferred from November meeting
- Member Working Groups Conclusion Report
- The draft Council Plan – 2024-2022

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
N/A

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES
None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS
None

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That Members note the report.

Report prepared by: Lorraine Fowkes – Corporate Director of Governance

