

Leader of the Council's Statement 2017/18



INTRODUCTION

East Staffordshire Borough Council has three Corporate Priorities:

- **Value For Money Council Services:**
Protecting your money
- **Promoting Local Economic Growth:**
To benefit local people by turning aspiration into reality
- **Protecting and Strengthening Communities:**
Love where you live

The following statement sets out how the Leader of the Council and officers within this portfolio area will contribute to achieving these priorities.

However throughout the statement there may be examples of joint delivery with other Executive Members as well as managers from other sections. The activities outlined in the statement are often cross-cutting themes with overlaps into other areas.

The statement also highlights past successes by highlighting the Council's key achievements in 2016/17.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2016/17

Over the past 12 months, the Council has been working hard to improve its services and is currently on track to achieve 93% of this portfolio's milestones set for 2016/17 by the end of the financial year.

Some of these achievements are highlighted in the following section.

Improvements to Customer Services

The Council has maximised income through effective collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates, and is expected to achieve collections rates 98% and 99% respectively.

It has monitored and improved access arrangements within its Customer Service Centres, and increased the offering with a dedicated Housing Options presence. The Housing Benefits Processing Real Time Information target has improved significantly and for the first time has achieved a turnaround target set under 10 days. The Council has continued to work with East Staffordshire Citizens Advice and prepared for the roll-out of the Government's Universal Credit.

New measures were put in place to collect as much as possible within the year from claimant error overpayments as well as ensuring that payment arrangements were in place with those who are unable to refund the whole amount in a short space of time.

Improving our Financial Resilience

The Council continued to ensure it has a firm and stable financial footing and that suitable and appropriate arrangements are maintained for ensuring value for money and financial resilience. It realised the savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and achieved unqualified auditor's opinion in relation to the accounts and Value for Money, whilst also having the 2015/16 Statement of Accounts audited and approved before the end of July

2016 which was two months ahead of the statutory deadline. The Council also went live with a new Corporate Fees and Charging Policy.

Publish the Council's Efficiency Plan

The Council published its Efficiency Plan and in doing so qualified for the Government's multi-year settlement deal.

A Busy Year in Elections

Despite 2016/17 being a year without Local Authority or Parliamentary elections, the Council delivered six neighbourhood planning referenda, the Police and Crime Commissioner Election, the European Union referendum, two by-elections and also completed the annual canvass of electors.

Human Resource and Payments Team

The Council is on course to reduce short term sickness days to an average of 3 days.

The Council aims to pay suppliers as promptly as possible, and it is on course to have achieved its target of the average time to pay being within 13 days, and 90% of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2017/18

2016/17 has been another successful period for the Council, but it is determined to build on this platform as it moves forward into the new financial year. It will continue to further improve service delivery, performance and value for money. This will be achieved through delivery of the Council's three Corporate Priorities, which will be supported by the following objectives and targets.

Improvements to Customer Services (Targets F01; F02; F03; F04; F05; F06; F07; F08; F16; F17)

The Council will continue to maximise income through effective collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates, and reduce former years' arrears. It will continue to monitor and, where appropriate, improve service and access arrangements within its Customer Service Centres. The Council will also continue with the multi-disciplinary team approach to enable seamless switching between front office and back office roles within Revenues, Benefits and Customer Contacts and work in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and other Staffordshire Districts to look at way of improving revenues and benefits services.

There will be significant policy activity and during the year there will be a review of the Council Tax Support Scheme and a review of the Recovery and Write-Off Policies. The Council will also continue to prepare for further development, roll-out and impact of the Government's Universal Credit benefit.

New Local Government Finance System (Target F13)

Central Government intend to introduce a new system of funding local authorities before the end of this Parliament. This includes the move towards 100% Business Rates Retention and a revision of the current needs based allocation of funding. These changes could potentially have a significant impact on the future levels of financial resources available to provide services to our residents. The Council will be proactive in terms of responding to

Government consultations and work in partnership with sector wide bodies in order to influence the design of the new system.

Continuing to Improve our Financial Resilience (Targets F09; F10; F11; F12; F14; F15; F18)

The Council will continue to ensure it has a firm and stable financial footing and that there are suitable and appropriate arrangements for ensuring value for money and financial resilience. This will be done by realising the savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and achieving unqualified auditor's opinions in relation to the accounts and Value for Money. Early closure of Accounts will be embedded before the statutory requirements come into force and the Council will, once again, aim to have its Statement of Accounts audited and approved two months ahead of the statutory deadline, whilst implementing new accounting requirements.

The forthcoming withdrawal of Revenue Support Grant with a greater reliance on income generation through fees and charges, Council Tax and Business Rates requires the Council to respond to and prepare for these challenges. It will work through the programme identified in the Corporate Fees and Charges Policy, will continue to look at ways of maximising the Council Tax and Business Rates Tax Bases, will carry out a review of Court costs for Council Tax and Business Rates and will look to introduce Council Tax penalties. The Council will also build on its treasury management approach and consider alternative treasury investment opportunities, including property funds.

To support these aims the Council will also continue to improve Member engagement and Member knowledge with the corporate Finance function through a series of financial briefings.

Human Resources (Target L01)

The Council will continue to monitor staffing availability through ongoing and detailed analysis of short term sickness absence, to ensure staffing resource is optimised.

Payments Team (Target L02)

The Council will continue to support businesses by promptly paying its Creditors, aiming to pay within an average of 13 days from receipt of invoice date.

Accommodation Review (Targets L03; L04)

In January 2017 a member working group was formed in order to consider the Council's future corporate accommodation needs. The accommodation review will seek to identify the most appropriate solution for meeting these needs and begin the process of working towards the delivery of the identified option.

Fit For Purpose Scrutiny Arrangement (Target L05)

In line with the Communities and Local Government Committee plans to open an inquiry into the effectiveness of Local Authority scrutiny arrangements the Council will carry out a review of our scrutiny committees and our approach to identify potential opportunities for improvement.

Appeals (Target L06)

To ensure that it continues to be robust in its decision making processes and in its work to defend legal challenges, the Council will monitor the proportion of appeals against the number of planning applications received. To do this the Council will this year establish a baseline figure in order to effectively review performance in the future.

Democracy and Elections (Targets L07; L08)

The Council will prepare for, and carry out, the County Council elections in May 2017 as well as deliver on the neighbourhood planning referenda during the year.

MEASURES AND TARGETS FOR 2017/18

The Leader of the Council's portfolio has identified a number of measures and targets for 2017/18 which will contribute to the delivery of the objectives detailed above. These are set out in the following tables.

Value For Money Council Services

Ref	Measures	Target 2016/17
F01	<p>Continue to improve the ways we provide Benefits to those most in need:</p> <p>Time taken to process Benefit new claims and change events (Previously NI 181)</p>	9 days
F02	<p>Continue to improve the ways we provide Benefits to those most in need:</p> <p>Time taken to process Benefit new claims when all the information has been provided</p>	3 days
F03	Continuing To Improve Customer Access To Services	99% of CSC and telephony team enquiries resolved at first point of contact
F04	Continuing To Improve Customer Access To Services	Minimum 70% Telephony team calls answered within 10 seconds
F05	Working Towards The Roll-Out Of Universal Credit	Continue to prepare for roll-out in accordance with Government guidelines (March 2018)

Ref	Measures	Target 2016/17
F06	<p>Working Towards The Reduction Of Claimant Error Housing Benefit Overpayments (Hbops):</p> <p>% Of Hbops Overpayments Recovered During The Year;</p> <p>% Of HBOPS Processed And On Payment Arrangement</p>	<i>To be agreed post outturn</i>
F07	<p>Continue To Maximise Income Through Effective Collection Processes</p> <p>(Previously BV 9 & 10)</p>	<p>Collection Rates of -</p> <p>Council Tax : 98%</p> <p>NNDR : 99%</p>
F08	<p>Continue To Maximise Income Through Effective Collection Processes:</p> <p>Reduce Former Years Arrears For Council Tax; NNDR; Sundry Debts</p>	<i>To be agreed post outturn</i>
F09	<p>Maintain And Improve The District Auditor's Opinion Of The Authority</p>	<p>Achieve unqualified opinions on -</p> <p>Statement of Accounts with minimal errors;</p> <p>In relation to Value for Money</p>
F10	<p>Set Budget For 2018/19</p>	<p>Set budget for Council approval</p> <p>(February 2018)</p>
F11	<p>Improve Finance Awareness With Members</p>	<p>At least 2 briefings delivered to elected members during the year</p>

Ref	Measures	Target 2016/17
F12	To Continually Improve The Value For Money Of Council Services	Achieve savings targets as stated in the Medium Term Financial Strategy <i>(March 2018)</i>
F13	To Engage Proactively With Professional Groups And Constructively Respond To Government Consultations Regarding The Establishment Of The New Local Government Finance Regime	Activities throughout the year reported in line with the timed responses <i>(March 2018)</i>
F14	To Continually Improve The Value For Money Of Council Services	Introduce Council Tax Penalties <i>(April 2017)</i>
F15	To Continually Improve The Value For Money Of Council Services	Review Court Costs for Council Tax and Business Rates <i>(Sept 2017)</i>
F16	To Continually Improve The Value For Money Of Council Services	Review Recovery and Write-Off Policies <i>(Sept 2017)</i>
F17	To Continually Improve The Value For Money Of Council Services	Review Council Tax Support Scheme <i>(June 2017)</i>
F18	To Continually Improve The Value For Money Of Council Services	Consider alternative Treasury Management opportunities <i>(Dec 2017)</i>
L01	Increasing Staffing Availability Through Reduced Sickness	Short term sickness days average under 2.95 days

Ref	Measures	Target 2016/17
L02	Improve On The Average Time To Pay Creditors	13 days
L03	Accommodation Review	Establish a project programme plan and commence delivery (<i>June 2017</i>)
L04	Accommodation Review	Complete the accommodation works (<i>March 2018</i>)
L05	Improve Council Scrutiny Arrangements	Report to Council with recommendations (<i>June 2017</i>)

Promoting Local Economic Growth

Ref	Measures	Target 2017/18
L06	Monitor Appeals	Establish baseline number of appeals against number of planning applications received (<i>March 2018</i>)
L07	Deliver Neighbourhood Planning Referenda	Complete in accordance with statutory requirements

Protecting and Strengthening Communities

Ref	Measures	Target 2017/18
L08	Deliver County Council Election	Complete in accordance with statutory requirements