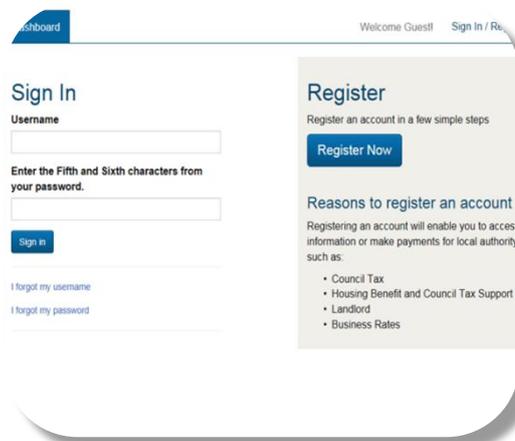
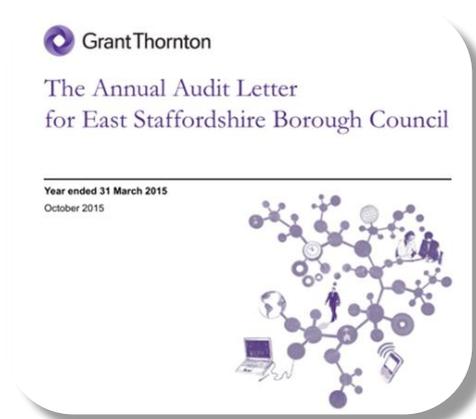


Deputy Leader Statement 2016/17



Portfolio for Finance

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 Deputy Leader for Finance and officers of the Council 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 2015/16.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2015/16

Over the past 12 months, the Council has been working hard to improve its services and is currently on track to achieve around 90% of this portfolio's milestones set for 2015/16 by the end of the financial year.

Some of these achievements are highlighted in the following section.

Improving Customer Service Delivery

Supplementing the implementation of the new Revenues and Benefits IT system software, the Council also went live with our Risk Based Verification approach on the new system. As part of the Government's phased implementation of Universal Credit, which is a single benefit that replaces seven other Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits, the Council has worked in partnership with the DWP and organisations such as Citizens Advice to provide help, guidance and support to claimants. The Council also implemented the use of Real Time Information (RTI) via H.M. Revenues and Customs, which provides more regular and up to date information on claimants' changes of circumstances.

The Council went live with the new Discretionary Rate Relief Procedures in April 2015, ensuring that the reviews are carried out in the agreed timescales. It also worked hard towards revenue collection rates and on processing performance. The Council also specifically looked at the access arrangements within our Customer Service Centres, and identified and introduced further improvements with new and better ways of working more effectively.

Improving 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.

Went Live with the new Internal Audit Contract

Following a competitive tender the Council went live with a new contract for Internal Audit activities, which was awarded to CW Audit.

Continuing Marcomms

As part of the Council's ongoing Marcomms approach, it implemented a new Brewhouse Microsite, as well as a new "Council News" section on the website. A new ESNews was introduced, at no cost to the Council which ensured that residents are still able to receive interesting articles and updates from the Council without necessarily relying on just what local media decide to publish.

Council's Technology Infrastructure

There has been a refresh of Council hardware and software, therefore further improving our technology architecture. The refresh has provided improved security as well as seamless remote access. Significant enhancements to customer self-service arrangements were also introduced, for example with the E-Revenues and E-Benefits functionality provided from the new Capita System.

Strengthening our Procurement Processes

The Council reviewed its end to end tendering procedures in order to continue to improve its procurement process and carried out an appraisal of its E-Tendering solution, which led to a competitive procurement exercise and an upgraded E-Sourcing Portal contract implemented.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2016/17

2015/16 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 led by the Finance area.

Further Improving Customer Services (Targets F01; F02; F03; F04; F05; F06; F07; F08; F09)

The Council will continue to maximise income through effective collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates to enhance its already high performance in these areas, as well as continuing to reduce the former years' arrears positions.

It will also continue to monitor and, where appropriate, improve access arrangements within its Customer Service Centres, including our telephony environments, to identify efficiencies and new and better ways of working more effectively. The Housing Benefits Processing RTI target will be stretched to 9 days which will be the first time that there has been a target set under 10 days. The Council will also introduce a new target of 3 days for turning around claims when all the information has actually been received. The Council will prepare for further development, roll-out and impact of the Government's Universal Credit approach to welfare provision.

Whilst overpayments are caused by claimant error / misinformation we endeavour to collect as much as possible within the year and will also ensure that payment arrangements in place with those who are unable to refund the whole amount in a short space of time.

Continuing to Improve our Financial Resilience (Targets F10; F11; F12; F13; F14)

The Council will continue to ensure it has a firm and stable financial footing for 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. Closure of Accounts as soon as possible is seen as best practice in both the private and public sectors, and the Council will aim to have its Statement of Accounts audited and approved two months ahead of the statutory deadline. It will also devise a new proportionate corporate fees and charging policy.

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.

Publish the Council's Efficiency Plan (Target F15)

The Council will continue to progress our continuous efficiency initiative, building on the significant achievements it has already realised. It will also ensure that plans are in place for the Council to continue to thrive during the course of this Parliament with the phasing out of the Revenue Support Grant.

Further Improvements to our Technology Architecture (Targets F16; F17; F18)

In order to underpin how the Council continues to work in efficient and safe environment it will ensure that there are ongoing improvements to its technology infrastructure. The Council will achieve compliance to the GCHQ Public Service Network in December 2016, which will mean that it continues to have sound governance and security arrangements in place, allowing the Council to maintain our connection onto the Government Secure Intranet and transact with central government departments. The Council will also continue to make substantial improvements to its network and operating capabilities,

thus ensuring that it first optimises and then capitalises on its agile working opportunities.

The Council will also conduct a full audit of all its maintenance and licensing arrangements with all of its technology vendors to ensure that we are receiving value for money through its current contractual arrangements.

Channel Shifting to SMARTER Resident Interaction (Targets F19; F20)

The Council will actively campaign and promote the web-site in order for it to become the preferred point of contact for resident enquiries. It will also focus on the Council's self-service facilities in high contact areas, such as Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Planning services, in order to maximise take-up of these more efficient and cost-effective access channels.

Contributing to New Ways of Working (Targets F21; F22)

The Council will work in collaboration with other service areas as it continues to appraise and investigate options for new methods of service delivery. This will include a review of the Shopmobility operation, as well as a detailed strategic appraisal of its Leisure and Cultural Services.

Procurement Strategy (Target F23)

In order to keep our Procurement procedures up to date and responsive, to both the Council's and the external market needs, our latest strategy will be refreshed, updated and adopted.

MEASURES AND TARGETS FOR 2016/17

The Finance portfolio has identified a number of measures and targets for 2016/17 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 | Review and revise where appropriate working arrangements with partners (September 2016) |

| Ref | Measures | Target 2016/17 |
|-----|---|---|
| F06 | Working towards the roll-out of Universal Credit | Continue to prepare for roll-out in accordance with Government guidelines (March 2017) |
| F07 | <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> |
| F08 | <p>Continue to maximise income through effective collection processes</p> <p>(Previously BV 9 & 10)</p> | Council Tax 98% and NNDR collection rates of 99% |
| F09 | <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> |
| F10 | Maintain and improve the District Auditor's opinion of the authority | Achieve unqualified opinions on Statement of Accounts with minimal errors; and in relation to Value for Money |
| F11 | Set budget for 2017/18 | Set budget for Council approval (February 2017) |

| Ref | Measures | Target 2016/17 |
|-----|--|--|
| F12 | Improve Finance awareness with Members | At least 2 briefings delivered to elected members during the year (March 2017) |
| F13 | To continually improve the value for money of council services | Achieve savings targets as stated in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (March 2017) |
| F14 | To continually improve the value for money of council services | Devise and introduce a new Corporate Fees and Charging Policy (December 2016) |
| F15 | To continually improve the value for money of council services | Consider the merits of introducing a Council Efficiency Plan <i>(date tbc)</i> |
| F16 | Providing a secure virtual working environment | Achieve GCHQ PSN Compliance for access to Government Secure Intranet (December 2016) |
| F17 | Delivering the SMART Borough Agenda | Maximise agile working opportunities through improved network access (June 2016) |
| F18 | Delivering the SMART Borough Agenda | Carry out maintenance and licensing review on software (December 2016) |
| F19 | Delivering the SMART Borough Agenda | E-Services campaign live with take-up baselined (June 2016) |

| Ref | Measures | Target 2016/17 |
|-----|--|--|
| F20 | Delivering the SMART Borough Agenda | E-Services take-up (March 2017) <i>(Target to be agreed post baseline as targeted in F19)</i> |
| F21 | Continuing to improve the value for money of council services | Carry out a review of the Shopmobility Service (December 2016) |
| F22 | To continually improve the value for money of council services | 90% satisfaction with the corporate contribution to the strategic leisure appraisal (March 2017) |
| F23 | To continually improve the value for money of council services | Revised Corporate Procurement Strategy approved (April 2016) |