



Please ask for: Matt Berry
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21 February 2024

Dear Councillor,

Cabinet

6:00pm on Thursday 29 February 2024

Meeting to be held in the Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock

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

Yours sincerely,

T. Clegg
Chief Executive

To: Councillors:

Johnson, T.B.	Leader of the Council
Newbury, J.A.A.	Deputy Leader of the Council and Regeneration & High Streets Portfolio Leader
Elson, J.S.	Community Wellbeing Portfolio Leader
Muckley, A.M.	Environment and Climate Change Portfolio Leader
Thornley, S.J.	Housing Portfolio Leader
Preece, J.P.T.L.	Parks, Culture, and Heritage Portfolio Leader
Prestwood, J.	Resources and Transformation Portfolio Leader
Fisher, P.A.	<i>Observer (non-voting)</i>

Agenda

Part 1

1. Apologies

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

To declare any interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

3. Minutes

To approve the Minutes of the meetings held on 17 January and 1 February 2024, and the joint meeting held with the Audit & Governance Committee on 7 February 2024 (enclosed).

4. Updates from Portfolio Leaders

To receive oral updates (if any), from the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader, and Portfolio Leaders.

5. Forward Plan

Forward Plan of Decisions for February to March 2024 (Item 5.1).

6. Quarter 3 Performance Report 2023/24

Report of the Head of Transformation & Assurance (Item 6.1 - 6.36).

7. Revenues and Benefits Collection Report - Quarter 3 2023/24

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 7.1 - 7.18).

Appendices 1, 2, and 3 to this report (Item 7.6 - 7.18) are confidential due to the inclusion of:

- Information relating to any individual.
- Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual, and
- Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).

8. Exclusion of the Public

The Leader to move:

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Agenda

Part 2

9. **Former Tenant Arrears Debt Recommended for Write-off**

Not for Publication Report of the Head of Housing & Corporate Assets (Item 9.1 - 9.5).

The report is confidential due to the inclusion of:

- Information relating to any individual, and
- Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Cabinet

Held on Wednesday 17 January 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

In the Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock

Part 1

Present:

Councillors:

Johnson, T.B.	Leader of the Council
Newbury, J.A.A.	Deputy Leader of the Council and Regeneration and High Streets Portfolio Leader
Elson, J.S.	Community Wellbeing Portfolio Leader
Muckley, A.M.	Environment & Climate Change Portfolio Leader
Thornley, S.J.	Housing Portfolio Leader
Preece, J.P.T.L.	Parks, Culture, and Heritage Portfolio Leader
Prestwood, J.	Resources and Transformation Portfolio Leader

72. Apologies

None received.

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

No other Declarations of Interest were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

74. General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2024-27

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 3.1 - 3.66).

The Environment & Climate Change Portfolio Leader raised concern with the impact the proposed reduction in grant aid support to Citizens Advice for 2024-25 would have on residents when accessing support and guidance, and so moved the following amendment to the draft general fund revenue budget for 2024-27, which was seconded by the Resources & Transformation Portfolio Leader:

“That the proposed £57,850 withdrawal of grant aid support to Citizens Advice for the 2024-25 be removed from the list of proposed budget savings (report paragraph 5.6) and that a review be undertaken during the 2024-25 financial year of grants given out by the Council to better understand what services were being provided by the relevant organisations for the money allocated to them.”

The S151 Officer advised that the proposal would lead to a circa £60,000 gap in the budget which would result in savings of the same value having to be found from elsewhere in the budget. Furthermore, if Members were minded to source this funding from reserves it would not be possible to say at this stage whether that could be done, noting that the S151 Officer had a legal responsibility to sign off that the reserves held by the Council were adequate.

The Head of Wellbeing advised that the Council was looking to go out tender for a poverty advisor post funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies for a 12-month period. The post would work out in the community providing targeted support for vulnerable residents.

Cabinet discussed the proposed amendment, acknowledging the concerns raised about the potential impact on residents should the grant aid be reduced and noted that other advice services also operated in the District. It was also noted that as part of the budget the Council was also having to make savings that would impact upon residents.

Officers clarified that the Council provided more grant funding to Citizens Advice than other organisations did and operated from their dedicated space in the Civic Centre rent free. Should the proposed funding reduction be retained, the grant paid by the Council would still be circa £97,000 per year (with continued free use of accommodation).

Members then clarified that if the proposed amendment was to be approved then the required funding to meet the circa £60,000 gap would need to be sourced from services budgets.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45pm to allow Cabinet to discuss the matter further in private. Officers were not present in the room whilst the debate took place.

The meeting then resumed at 7:10pm with Officers present again.

The Leader advised that the amendment had been withdrawn by the Environment & Climate Change Portfolio Leader and the Resources & Transformation Portfolio Leader. This was confirmed by the Portfolio Leaders.

The Environment & Climate Change Portfolio Leader asked that a full review of grant funding be undertaken. The S151 Officer confirmed this would be done as part of the 2025-26 budget setting process.

The Deputy Leader asked if the tender process for the poverty advisor post could be expedited so it could be appointed as soon as possible.

The Environment & Climate Change Portfolio Leader further asked that Cabinet members be fully involved in the budget setting process for 2025/26. The Chief Executive confirmed this would be the case.

Resolved:

That the following budget recommendations be noted, in advance of consultation being undertaken with the Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee and the Shadow Cabinet (as required by the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules):

- (a) The Budget Requirement for the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2024-25 be set at £15.703 million.
- (b) The indicative General Fund Revenue Budgets be set at £16.334 million for 2025-26 and £16.793 million for 2026-27.

- (c) The General Fund working balance be set at a minimum of £1 million.
- (d) The detailed capital programme as set out in report appendices 2 and 3 be approved along with the Community Infrastructure Levy allocations in report appendix 4.
- (e) That the Council Tax for 2024-25 be increased by 2.99% to £244.00.
- (f) The Council's Tax Base be set at 30,014.76 (as determined by the Deputy Chief Executive (S151) reducing the tax base of 34,356.69 to reflect the collection rate).
- (g) Note that the inflation parameter for fees and charges for 2024-25 was generally set at 6%.
- (h) That the detailed portfolio budgets as set out in report appendix 1 be approved.

Reason for Decisions

As part of the Council's annual budget setting process, the Cabinet was required to determine its budget requirement and seek approval from Council to approve it. The above recommendations would allow the Council to set the budget it needed to carry out its functions.

75. Housing Revenue Account Budgets 2023/24 to 2026/27

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Head of Housing & Corporate Assets and the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 4.1 - 4.7).

Resolved:

That the following budget recommendations be noted, in advance of consultation being undertaken with the Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee and the Shadow Cabinet (as required by the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules):

- (A) The revised position with regard to estimated income and expenditure for the 2023-24 HRA and budgets for the period 2024-25 to 2026-27 as summarised in appendix 1 be noted.
- (B) That Council on 21 February 2024 be recommended to:-
 - (i) Determine a minimum level of working balances of £2.923 million for 31 March 2025 and indicative working balances of £3.057 million and £3.214 million for 31 March 2026 and 2027 respectively.
 - (ii) Approve the HRA Revenue Budgets for 2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27 (and note the forecast outturn for 2023-24) as summarised in report appendix 1.

Reason for Decisions

Cabinet was required to propose a budget in relation to the Housing Revenue Account for submission to Council on 21 February 2024.

76. Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes 2023/24 to 2026/27

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Head of Housing & Corporate Assets and the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 5.1 - 5.5).

Resolved:

That the following budget recommendations be noted, in advance of consultation being undertaken with the Responsible Council Scrutiny Committee and the Shadow Cabinet (as required by the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules):

- (A) That the estimated availability of Housing Revenue Account capital resources for the period 2023-24 to 2026-27 (as set out in report Appendix 1) be noted.
- (B) That Council on 21 February 2024 is recommended to approve the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme for the period 2023-24 to 2026-27 (as set out in report Appendix 2).

Reason for Decisions

Cabinet was required to propose a budget in relation to the Housing Revenue Account for submission to Council on 21 February 2024.

The meeting closed at 7:15 p.m.

Leader

Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Cabinet

Held on Thursday 1 February 2024 at 6:00 p.m.
In the Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock

Part 1

Present:

Councillors:

Johnson, T.B.	Leader of the Council
Newbury, J.A.A.	Deputy Leader of the Council and Regeneration and High Streets Portfolio Leader
Elson, J.S.	Community Wellbeing Portfolio Leader
Muckley, A.M.	Environment & Climate Change Portfolio Leader
Thornley, S.J.	Housing Portfolio Leader
Preece, J.P.T.L.	Parks, Culture, and Heritage Portfolio Leader
Prestwood, J.	Resources and Transformation Portfolio Leader

77. Apologies

None received.

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

No other Declarations of Interest were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

79. Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023 be approved.

80. Updates from Portfolio Leaders

(i) Regeneration & High Streets

The Portfolio Leader updated in respect of the following:

- **Amazon Update**

Following the announcement from Amazon last summer that they would be leaving their fulfilment centre site in Rugeley, the Council established a taskforce with Staffordshire County Council. A document was prepared to be shared with Amazon employees, especially those who did not wish to relocate to the facility based in Minworth.

The drop-in session previously discussed was held yesterday, with representatives from the National Careers Services (NCS), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), South Staffordshire College and the Staffordshire Jobs & Careers Service (SJCS), in attendance. Circa 160 Amazon employees were in attendance, all of whom were keen to find out what employment and skills/training opportunities were available to them. The majority of those present were from Staffordshire, with others attending from the wider West Midlands area. The NCS offered advice on how to access support in the local area; the DWP provided details on their range of services available, included employability support and benefits advice; the college gave out leaflets on their courses available; and the SJCS gave an overview of their website and how to undertake job searches.

Confirmation had been received that the Rugeley fulfilment centre would close on 17 February. As well supported affected colleagues, the key priority for the Council was to contact the site owner to get it re-let as soon as possible.

Thanks were also given to the officers involved as they had worked hard behind the scenes since the initial closure announcement was made.

(ii) **Environment & Climate Change**

The Portfolio Leader updated in respect of the following:

- **Cleaner Cabs for Cannock Chase**

Corky's cars had purchased 2 fully electric vehicles to use in their fleet alongside the extensive number of hybrid vehicles already in operation. To celebrate this, the company would be offering free journeys to random customers who book a ride with during February. Customers could not however request a ride in one of the Tesla vehicles. The company was hoping to be 100% green by 2025.

This was a positive move from a local company, and it was hoped they would be a trailblazer for other business across the District.

- **Waste Transfer Stations**

At the Staffordshire Sustainability Board held in January, I raised a question regarding waste transfer stations in the County as the Council was potentially sending more staff than need be to the Energy Recovery Facility due to using smaller vehicles than other councils. Staffordshire County Council advised that they would be looking into transfer stations locally, which would hopefully allow this Council to free up more staff.

- **'Green' Electricity**

From March 2024, the Council would be certified that all its electricity used was from green sources.

An application had to be made to achieve this certificate, so confirmation had been received this would happen.

Great Imaging - training coming up, also being provided by Globe Foundation (based in Uttoxeter) on 28th and 29th February.

- **Waste & Recycling Communications Plan**

Work was being undertaken with officers on a waste & recycling communications plan to give a more strategic focus on this area and talk more on 'reduce, reuse, recycle', with an initial focus on the 'reduce' element.

(iii) **Leader of the Council**

The Leader updated in respect of the following:

- **External Auditor's Value for Money Report Press Release**

The response to the report as published on Tuesday committed the Council to making the required improvements and adjustments needed to ensure it continued to provide quality services to its tenants and residents

81. Forward Plan

Resolved:

That the Forward Plan of Decisions for the period February to March 2024 (Item 5.1 – 5.3) be noted.

82. Outturn 2022-23

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 6.1 - 6.32).

Resolved:

That:

(A) The outturn position for the year ending 31 March 2023 be noted.

(B) The financing of the capital programme as outlined in the report be approved.

Reason for Decisions

The 2022/23 budget report set out an indicative capital programme and financing. This report set out the actual capital spend and therefore financing to be approved.

83. Housing Revenue Account - Final Accounts 2022-23

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources and the Head of Housing & Corporate Assets (Item 7.1 - 7.6).

Resolved:

That:

(A) The final accounts position of the Housing Revenue Account for the year ending 31 March 2023 be noted.

(B) The financing of the capital programme as outlined in the report be approved.

Reasons for Decisions

The final accounts position needed to be reported to Members and the financing of the capital programme was required to be approved.

84. General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme 2024-2027

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 8.1 - 8.66).

Resolved:

That the following be recommended to the full Council meeting to be held on 21 February 2024:

- (A) The Budget requirement for the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2024-25 be set at £15.703 million.
- (B) The indicative General Fund Revenue Budgets be set at £16.334 million for 2025-26 and £16.793 million for 2026-27.
- (C) The General Fund working balance be set at a minimum of £1 million.
- (D) The detailed capital programme as set out in report appendices 2 and 3 be approved, along with the Community Infrastructure Levy allocations in report appendix 4.
- (E) The Council Tax for 2024-25 be increased by 2.99% to £244.00.
- (F) The Council's Tax Base be set at 30,014.76 (as determined by the S151 Officer reducing the tax base of 34,356.69 to reflect the collection rate).
- (G) The inflation parameter for fees and charges for 2024-25 was generally set at 6% be noted.
- (H) The detailed portfolio budgets as set out in report appendix 1 be approved.

Reason for Decisions

As part of the Council's annual budget setting process, it was required to determine its budget requirement and seek approval from full Council to approve it. The above recommendations allowed the Council to set the budget it needed to carry out its functions.

85. Rent and Income Collection Policy

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing and Corporate Assets (Item 9.1 - 9.8).

Resolved:

That the Housing Rent Setting Policy as set out in report appendix 1 be agreed and implemented with effect from 1 April 2024.

Reasons for Decisions

The Rent Standard formed part of the regulatory framework for social housing and from April 2020 the Council's rent setting had been subject to the regulatory framework.

86. Housing Revenue Account Budgets 2023-24 to 2026-27

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources and the Head of Housing & Corporate Assets (Item 10.1 - 10.8).

Resolved:

That:

- (A) The revised position with regard to estimated income and expenditure for the 2023-24 Housing Revenue Account and budgets for the period 2024-25 to 2026-27 as summarised in report appendix 1 be noted.
- (B) Council, at its meeting to be held on 21 February 2024, be recommended to:
 - (i) Determine a minimum level of working balances of £2.923 million for 31 March 2025 and indicative working balances of £3.057 million and £3.214 million for 31 March 2026 and 2027, respectively.
 - (ii) Approve the Housing Revenue Account Revenue Budgets for 2024-25, 2025-26, and 2026-27 (and note the forecast outturn for 2023-24) as summarised in report appendix 1.

Reason for Decisions

Cabinet was required to propose a budget in relation to the Housing Revenue Account for submission to Council on 21 February 2024.

87. Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes 2023-24 to 2026-27

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources and the Head of Housing & Corporate Assets (Item 11.1 - 11.5).

Resolved:

That:

- (A) The estimated availability of Housing Revenue Account capital resources for the period 2023-24 to 2026-27, as set out in report appendix 1, be noted.
- (B) Council, at its meeting to be held on 21 February 2024, be recommended to approve the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme for the period 2023-24 to 2026-27, as set out in report appendix 2.

Reason for Decisions

Cabinet was required to propose a budget in relation to the Housing Revenue Account for submission to Council on 21 February 2024.

88. Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, and Annual Investment Strategy 2024-25

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 12.1 - 12.34).

Resolved:

- (A) That the following be recommended to Council on 21 February 2024 for approval:
 - (i) The Prudential and Treasury Indicators.
 - (ii) The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement.
 - (iii) The Treasury Management Policy.
 - (iv) The Annual Investment Strategy for 2024-25.

- (B) That it be noted that indicators may change in accordance with the final recommendations from Cabinet to Council in relation to both the General Fund Revenue Budget and the Capital Programme.

Reason for Decisions

The Council was required to approve its treasury management, investment, and capital strategies to ensure that cash flow was adequately planned and that surplus monies were invested appropriately.

89. Council Tax Charges in Respect of Unoccupied Empty Dwellings

Consideration was given to the report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources (Item 13.1 - 13.8).

Resolved:

That:

- (A) The report be noted.
- (B) Council, at its meeting to be held on 6 March 2024, be recommended to:
- (i) Resolve to remove the current 12-month exemption given to properties which were unoccupied, substantially unfurnished, uninhabitable and in need of or undergoing major repair or structural alteration with effect from 1 April 2024.
 - (ii) Resolve to introduce a 100% premium to the Council Tax liability in respect of properties which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 12 months with effect from 1 April 2024.
 - (iii) Resolve to introduce a 100% premium to the Council Tax liability in respect of properties which are not occupied as any person's sole or main residence and are substantially furnished (often referred to as second homes) with effect from 1 April 2025.

Reasons for Decisions

There was no evidence that the exemption for uninhabitable property encouraged the renovation of such premises or expedited their bringing into use. Administration of the exemption was very burdensome, due to it often being misconstrued by owners of properties undertaking remedial repairs or cosmetic improvements to dwellings. Options existed for the Valuation Office Agency to remove dwellings that were derelict from the Valuation List in the most severe cases.

It was expected that the introduction of an empty property levy after 12 months rather than 24 months would encourage earlier engagement from owners and in many cases expedite the occupation of their properties.

Similarly, the imposition of a second home premium would encourage some homes to be put to better use and would afford owners of the properties a choice as to whether to pay the premium or bring their dwelling into use. This premium would be introduced from 2025, giving owners time to deal with their properties.

Safeguards would exist by way of the Government's intention to provide statutory exceptions to the premiums for some categories of dwelling.

90. Permission to Spend - Hotel Costs

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Wellbeing (Item 14.1 - 14.3).

Resolved:

That

- (A) Permission to spend be granted to spend the £175,500 of funding that was allocated to Cannock Chase District Council in relation to the costs associated with the operation of the hotel. The exact allocation of funding would be determined as the level of demand on housing options became clearer.
- (B) Permission be granted to delegate the final breakdown of funding to the Head of Wellbeing in consultation with Community Wellbeing Portfolio Leader.

Reason for Decisions

Funding had been allocated by the Home Office to Cannock Chase District Council to cover costs associated with the operation of the hotel in Cannock used to house asylum seekers whilst their asylum claims were being processed. The report sought permission to spend that funding where costs had been incurred.

91. Permission to Spend - Health Inequalities Projects Funding

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Wellbeing (Item 15.1 - 15.4).

Resolved:

That:

- (A) Authority be delegated to the Head of Wellbeing in consultation with the Community Wellbeing Portfolio Leader to spend £325,000 of funding to deliver the following three projects related to health inequalities work.
 - The first project was focussed on identifying damp and mould within privately rented and owned homes (£55,000).
 - The second project looked to address mental health issues affecting tenants of multi-occupied homes in the District (£55,000).
 - The third project was to extend the successful work of Cannock Chase Can (£215,000). £8,000 of this funding would be retained by the Council for an officer to work with Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles on a part-time basis to deliver the scheme. The remaining £207,000 would be in the form of grant funding passported to Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles who were leading on the delivery of Cannock Chase Can.
- (B) Authority be delegated to the Head of Wellbeing in consultation with the Community Wellbeing Portfolio Leader to enter into any necessary legal agreements with grant recipients that were required to facilitate the delivery of the projects.

Reasons for Decisions

Funding had been allocated by the Staffordshire Health Inequalities Directors' Group (HIDG) to ensure that local public health priorities were met. The projects proposed would demonstrate a measurable impact on reducing health inequalities in line with HIDG priorities and in defined hot-spot areas.

Projects focussed on housing issues within the District's most disadvantaged wards were an area of focus, hence two of the projects chosen. This aligned with the wider work of the HIDG and would enable the Council to effectively target resources to areas of greatest need within the District.

The third project was an extension of an existing initiative that had been shown to improve population health.

All funding must be spent by September 2024, which had informed the choice of projects. Any unspent funding must be returned.

92. GBSLEP Future Impact Fund

Consideration was given to the report of the Leader of the Council (Item 16.1 - 16.5).

Resolved:

That the urgent decision taken by the Leader of the Council to approve the receipt of funding from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership Future Impact Fund to fund a skills project to be delivered by South Staffordshire College be noted.

Reason for Decision

To ensure transparency and probity in the use of public funding by publicising the decision by the Leader of the Council to agree to the Council receiving funding from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership and funding a skills project led by South Staffordshire College.

93. Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

Cannock Chase Council
Minutes of the Meeting of the
Cabinet

Held on Thursday 1 February 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

In the Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock

Part 2

94. Provision of Leisure, Culture, and Heritage Services

Consideration was given to the Not for Publication Report of the Head of Wellbeing (Item 18.1 - 18.6).

Resolved:

That subject to full Council approving budgetary provision, Cabinet agrees the sum set out in report paragraph 2.1 as the Management Fee for the delivery of leisure, culture, and heritage facilities and services by Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles in 2024/25.

Reason for Decision

To ensure ongoing provision of leisure, cultural, and heritage facilities in the District, a management fee to be paid to Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles had to be agreed.

The sum as set out in report paragraph 2.1 would ensure the continuation of services and had been built into the 2024/25 budget for Cannock Chase Council.

The meeting closed at 7:27 p.m.

Leader

Cannock Chase Council

Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the

Cabinet and Audit & Governance Committee

Held on Wednesday 7 February 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

In the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Cannock

Part 1

Present:

Councillors:

Cabinet

Johnson, T.B.	Leader of the Council
Muckley, A.M.	Environment and Climate Change Portfolio Leader
Thornley, S.J.	Housing Portfolio Leader
Preece, J.P.T.L.	Parks, Culture, and Heritage Portfolio Leader
Prestwood, J.	Resources and Transformation Portfolio Leader

Audit & Governance Committee

Dunnett, M.J. (Chair)
Jones, P.G.C. (Vice-Chair)
Bishop, L.
Hoare, M.W.A.
Johnson, J.P.
Stanton, P.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J.A.A. Newbury (Deputy Leader, Cabinet), J.S. Elson (Community Wellbeing Portfolio Leader, Cabinet), P. Fisher (non-voting observer, Cabinet), and J. Hill (Audit & Governance Committee member).

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

No other Declarations of Interest were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

3. Auditor's Annual Report for 2021-22 and 2022-23

Consideration was given the report of the External Auditors (Item 3.1 - 3.47).

The External Auditor introduced the report, drawing Members attention to the three statutory recommendations as set on reports pages 3.7-3.12. Whilst the report related to the 2021-22 and 2022-23 financial years and so some matters may have moved on, it was important for Members to be aware of and understand the issues identified.

4. Council's Response to the Auditor's Annual Report for 2021-22 and 2022-23

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources & S151 Officer (Item 4.1 - 4.17).

The Chief Executive introduced the Council's response, thanking the External Auditor and their team for the work undertaken in bringing the report forward. The report was statutorily required to be reported to full Council and approval sought of the Auditor's recommendations. The Council's leadership team had reflected on the issues identified and an improvement plan produced to fulfil the recommendations. Members would receive regular updates on delivery of the plan and conversations would be needed about what services could be delivered in future and the resources required to do so.

The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources then took Members through the improvement plan, drawing specific attention to the actions required to achieve the statutory recommendations. Progress in delivering the actions would primarily be overseen by the leadership and Audit & Governance Committee. The Committee would be able to escalate any concerns to the Cabinet for consideration, and Cabinet would also receive regular progress updates on delivery. Additionally, a housing board would be established to oversee delivery of the actions in respect of the Housing Revenue Account. Significant funds had been put into the budgets of both Cannock Chase and Stafford Borough Councils (CCDC and SBC) to invest in finance and transformation work to help drive forward the required work.

The Leader advised the Council recognised the importance of the External Auditor's report and would make the requires improvements. As identified in the improvement plan, each action had designated lead officers and timescales which would help Members to monitor progress.

In response to a query from a Member of the Audit & Governance Committee as to who externally would monitor delivery of the recommendations, the External Auditor advised that new External Auditors would be coming in who would be briefed on the report so it would be down to them to monitor as needs and determine if progress had been made.

In response to a query from the same Member as to how the budget allocation for investment in finance and transformation was being funded, the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that it was a resource allocation built into the base budget on an ongoing basis.

In response to a query from the same Member as to how confident officers were that the recommendations could be achieved, the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised they were confident that work would get underway with the resource allocated, but more may be required as the process continued.

The Leader noted that delivery of the actions would be a challenge for all, noting that suitable training for budget managers and Members would be important.

A Member of the Audit & Governance Committee noted they had been a member of it on and off over several years and that regular changes in membership made it difficult for Members to build up knowledge and experience of relevant matters.

In response to a query from another Member of the Audit & Governance Committee as to whether the situation was unique to this Council and whether any lessons learnt had been taken on board, the External Auditor advised the situation was not unique and it was highly likely that other councils would see such reports coming forward. A large part of the issue was having the required people in place to deliver services as a lot of councils had employees retiring after the Covid-19 pandemic and have found it difficult to recruit to vacant posts. The Deputy Chief Executive-Resources advised that CCDC

and SBC were in a fortunate position in that they had not engaged in complex matters such as commercial investments or private finance initiatives (PFIs) so the issues identified in the report should be more fixable. In respect of staffing resource there was a need to look at sourcing local talent and supporting and developing them.

A Member of the Audit & Governance Committee noted that as a new councillor with no previous experience, it could feel overwhelming when trying to understand the reports and issues presented, so any additional training would be of help.

The Chief Executive advised that for many councils, particularly those at district level, finance had become tighter and less resource available to deliver services. As such, there was a need for the sector collectively to find a way to attract younger people to come and work in it. In respect of the audit report, many of the issues identified had previously been raised by the Internal Audit team so thanks were given to them for their hard work. It was acknowledged the issues had not been responded to quickly enough and a greater focus on this would be given by the leadership team.

The Members of the Cabinet and the Audit & Governance Committee then voted separately on the recommendations as set out in the report of the Deputy Chief Executive-Resources & S151 Officer and it was:

Resolved:

That:

- (A) The findings, recommendations and management comments set out in the Auditor's Annual Report for 2021/22 and 2022/23 be noted.
- (B) Council, at its meeting to be held on 21 February 2024, be recommended to accept the Statutory Recommendations set out in the Auditor's Annual Report for 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- (C) Council, at its meeting to be held on 21 February 2024, be recommended to approve the improvement plan attached at appendix 1 of the S151 Officer's report to address the issues identified in the Auditor's Annual Report.
- (D) The additional resources required to address the issues identified in the Auditor's Annual Report, as set out in paragraph 5.9 of the S151 Officer's report, which were provided for in the 2024/25 budget, be noted.

Reason for Decisions

The Auditor's Annual Report had identified several significant issues related to the Council's financial, governance and asset management arrangements that needed to be addressed as a priority.

The meeting closed at 6:30 p.m.

Leader

**Audit & Governance Committee
Chair**

Forward Plan of Decisions to be taken by the Cabinet: February to March 2024

For Cannock Chase Council, a key decision is as an Executive decision that is likely to:

- Result in the Council incurring expenditure or making savings at or above a threshold of 0.5% of the gross turnover of the Council.
- Affect communities living or working in two or more Council Wards.

Representations in respect of any of matters detailed below should be sent in writing to the contact officer indicated alongside each item via email to membersservices@cannockchasedc.gov.uk

Copies of non-confidential items will be published on the Council's website 5 clear working days prior to the relevant meeting date.

Item	Contact Officer / Cabinet Member	Date of Cabinet	Key Decision	Confidential Item	Reasons for Confidentiality	Representations Received
February 2024 (29/02/24)						
Quarter 3 Performance Report 2023/24	Head of Transformation & Assurance / Resources and Transformation Portfolio Leader	29/02/24	No	No		N/A
Revenues and Benefits Collection Report - Quarter 3 2023/24	Deputy Chief Executive-Resources / Resources & Transformation Portfolio Leader	29/02/24	No	Yes (Appendices only)	Information relating to any individual. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).	
Former Tenant Arrears Debt Recommended for Write-off	Head of Housing and Corporate Assets / Housing Portfolio Leader	29/02/24	No	No	Information relating to any individual. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.	
March 2024						
Review of Housing Allocations Policy	Head of Housing & Corporate Assets / Housing Portfolio Leader	29/02/24	No	No		N/A
Business Growth Programme	Head of Economic Development & Planning / Regeneration and High Streets Portfolio Leader	29/02/24	No	No		N/A

Quarter 3 Performance Report 2023/24

Committee:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	29 February 2024
Report of:	Head of Transformation and Assurance
Portfolio:	Resources and Transformation

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise Members on the progress of the Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs) and Council's performance at the end of the third quarter of 2023-24.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the progress at the end of the third quarter relating to the delivery of the Council's priorities as detailed at Appendices 1a-1d and the performance information set out at Appendix 2.
- 2.2 To note that the timetable for the delivery of the local plan has been revised, with the agreement of a revised Local Development Scheme by Cabinet / Council, and performance is now being measured against the revised timetable.
- 2.3 To note that work on the Sustainability strategy has been delayed and will now be completed in 2024/25.

Reasons for Recommendations

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

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 The Priority Delivery Plans set out the key projects and actions for delivery in 2023/24. These are based on the Corporate Plan 2022-26 and the supporting four-year delivery plans.
- 3.2 Overall, 74% of the projects have been delivered or are on schedule to be completed. Progress in delivering the PDPs is summarised in section 5 of the report and set out in detail in Appendices 1a to 1d.
- 3.3 With regard to the operational performance of the key services of the Council, 72% of targets have been met or exceeded. Further details can be found at 5.6 and in Appendix 2.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2022-26 was approved by Council on 27 April 2022, setting out the priorities and strategic objectives. The supporting four-year

delivery plans were approved on 16 November 2022. The indicators and actions contribute individually to the Council's priorities and objectives.




5 Report Detail

Background

- 5.1 The Priority Delivery Plans (PDPs) set out in Appendices 1a to 1d to this report are the annual documents that set out how the Council will achieve progress against its strategic objectives; these plans establish the actions and timetable for delivery that are the basis of the Council's performance reporting framework.
- 5.2 In addition to the PDPs, performance is also reported against the delivery of key operational services; Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for these services are set out in Appendix 2.
- 5.3 Where applicable, we will also report on new or additional duties undertaken by the Council during the quarter, as part of this report.

Priority Delivery Plans

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

Corporate Plan Priority					N/A	Total Number of Projects
	Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	Work not yet due to be started	
Economic Prosperity	5	11	3	1		20
Health and Wellbeing	3	9	1	2		15
Community		14	2		2	18
Responsible Council	2	4	3	3		12
Total	10	38	9	6	2	65

- 5.5 At the end of quarter 3, of the 65 actions planned for delivery in 2023/24:
- 16% have been completed;
 - 58% are on target to be completed;
 - 14% have slipped slightly;
 - 9% are more than 3 months behind schedule; and
 - 3% are not yet due.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

5.6 A dashboard of key performance indicators for the Council's operational services is set out in Appendix 2. In summary:

- 9 indicators show performance above target (50%)
- 4 indicators show performance on target (22%)
- 5 indicators show performance below target (28%)

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

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

The financial management of the PDPs is standard in accordance with Financial Regulations and any measure to address a performance shortfall as reflected in a PDP report will require compensatory savings to be identified in the current year and be referred to the budget process for additional resources in future years.

6.2 Legal

None

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Risk Management

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

6.5 Equalities and Diversity

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

6.6 Health

None

6.7 Climate Change

There are specific objectives within all of the priority areas which address the challenge of climate change.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1a: Economic Prosperity PDP

Appendix 1b: Health and Wellbeing PDP

Appendix 1c: The Community PDP

Appendix 1d: Responsible Council PDP

Appendix 2: Key Performance Indicators

8 Previous Consideration

None

9 Background Papers

Corporate Plan 2022-26 - Council 27 April 2022





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

Contact Officer:	Adrian Marklew
Telephone Number:	01543 464598
Ward Interest:	All Wards
Report Track:	Cabinet: 29/02/24
Key Decision:	No

Priority Delivery Plan for 2023-24

PRIORITY 1 - ECONOMIC PROSPERITY “To reinvigorate the economy and create a District that thrives”

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

				N/A	Total Number of Projects
Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	Action not yet due	
5	11	3	1		20


Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3




Good progress being made with the Council's UKSPF Investment plan with the Cannock Construction excellence work completed and launch event held in October 2023. The Youth Aspiration project is progressing through the final stages of procurement ahead of a 1 April 2024 launch.


Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3





Levelling Up Fund - outline planning application considered by Planning Committee in November 2023 and approved subject to completion of a section 106 agreement. CPO Statement of Case submitted in December 2023. The project adjustment and extension of time request submitted to DLUHC in November 2023 is still awaiting a decision which prevents progress on a number of key workstreams.





Cannock Railway Station - As reported at Q2, the Council is not yet in a position to develop a detailed business case, and there are no active opportunities to bid for external funding to fund the project.




Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Attract investment to develop the District's economy							
Deliver the Levelling Up Fund regeneration scheme for Cannock Town Centre, creating a new cultural hub and high-quality public realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure outline planning consent for LUF scheme 	X				<p>Project Adjustment Request (PAR) submitted to DLUHC in October 2023, requesting extension to deadline for project spend/delivery. PAR request has been acknowledged but DLUHC currently unable to confirm whether extension will be granted.</p> <p>Project scope currently being reviewed to understand what could be delivered by 31 March 2025 and whether project is viable in its current form</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of design and cost plan 	X				<p>RIBA 3 design work completed for scheme included in PAR submission. Design and budget review currently taking place linked to review of project viability (as above).</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence demolition and clearance of existing sites 				X	<p>Demolition cannot commence until land assembly is completed.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compulsory Purchase Order approval from Secretary of State 				X	<p>CPO Statement of case submitted in December 2023; awaiting date of public inquiry - likely to be summer 2024.</p>	





Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
<p>Work in partnership to secure investment in major projects to create confidence in our District</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in the UKReIFF 2023 event to promote the District to developers/investors 	X				<p>As noted in the Q1 update, the Head of Economic Development and Planning attended UKReIFF event as part of the 'We are Staffordshire' team. Preparation is now starting for the 2024 event</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-development of former Rugeley Power Station as a Zero Carbon community - owner to commence build out of development scheme 				X	<p>Site sale process ongoing Planning application for All Through School has been submitted by appointed contractor to Lichfield DC</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannock Railway Station - transformational upgrade. Detailed business case and funding strategy. 	X				<p>While work has been undertaken in relation to the design and feasibility of achieving a transformational upgrade to the station, the Council is not yet in a position to develop a detailed business case, and there are no active opportunities to bid for external funding to fund the project. Project partners will consider next steps for the project in Q4.</p>	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
<p>Identify a pipeline of future projects to support economic growth opportunities and the rejuvenation of our town centres across Rugeley, Hednesford, Cannock and the surrounding villages and maximise investment and funding into the District</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of projects set out in the Council's approved UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Investment Plan 	X	X	X	X	<p>West Midlands Grant Programme, Net Zero Pathfinder, Go Digital Accelerator and Cannock Construction Excellence Initiative have all signed their grant agreements.</p> <p>Net Zero Pathfinder and Go Digital Accelerator launched in August</p> <p>Cannock Construction Excellence work has been completed and launch event took place last October.</p> <p>Agreement from the UKSPF Project Board in July to progress the Enterprise Advice & Support Programme - the grant funding agreement has been signed.</p> <p>Youth Aspiration project tender has been advertised and tenders are now in for assessment - contract commencement should be 1 April 2024.</p> <p>Life Skills project tender documents being drafted with intention of publishing them in February 2024 with intention to commence contract in April 2024.</p> <p>Beat the Cold - funding grant agreement has now been signed and delivery going well.</p> <p>Poverty Benefits Advisor - Head of Wellbeing is procuring this service with planned spend in 2024/2025.</p>	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Encourage entrepreneurship, promote apprenticeships, and support business							
Seek to identify and promote employment sites for new and growing businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New employment allocations to be identified via new Local Plan 		X	X	X	Regulation 19 Local Plan identifies new employment allocations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop proposal for business workspace in Levelling Up Fund project 		X			The requirements for business workspace have been built into the LUF RIBA stage 3 design work. As noted above, the project viability is currently being reviewed and extension request has been submitted to DLUHC.	
Work with established Growth and Skills Hubs to streamline and simplify access to business support services, access to training and apprenticeships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote availability of support from existing Growth and Skills Hubs to increase business referrals 	X	X	X	X	E-bulletins sent to businesses on our database as and when information is shared with the Economic Development Team	
Continue to work with partners to secure additional funding to be able to continue business growth and start-up schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission and procure new start up support provision utilising UKSPF funding 		X			Agreement from UKSPF Board in July 2023 for Staffordshire County Council to deliver the Enterprise Advice & Support Programme funded through UKSPF which will cover Working for Yourself / Loans to step up businesses / Get started and Grow. West Midlands SME Grant Programme is providing grants for start-up and growing businesses	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Attract modern, green and skilled industries, and create jobs							
Work with our colleges and training providers to equip young people and all residents with skills they need to access employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission and fund Cannock Construction Excellence project (South Staffordshire College) utilising UKSPF allocation 	X	X	X	X	<p>The facility is now completed and was formally opened in October 2023</p> <p>The Council has also secured £73k of GBSLEP funding to finance the installation of an outdoor concrete construction pad to support learners</p>	
Work with partners to identify and support businesses to become more carbon efficient and identify opportunities to create green jobs in our District.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission and fund Staffordshire Net Zero pathfinder project 	X	X	X	X	The project has been launched and is being promoted to local businesses.	
Rejuvenate our town centres							
Identify opportunities to improve public realm in our town centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannock Town Centre - LUF investment in public realm enhancements - sign off of detailed scheme and cost plan 		X			<p>Public realm enhancements included as part of RIBA Stage 3 design work.</p> <p>As noted above, the project viability is currently being reviewed and extension request has been submitted to DLUHC</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rugeley Boardwalk - replacement scheme - review inflation and construction cost pressures and present options to Cabinet 			X		Reported to Cabinet last October and agreed to consider potential future funding for Rugeley Boardwalk as part of the Council's wider capital budget setting process	





Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Work with town and parish councils, local businesses and traders to support the development of initiatives to increase vibrancy of our town centres and increase footfall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular liaison meetings with town and parish councils to identify opportunities for joint working 	X	X	X	X	The Economic Development Team is in regular contact with the seven town and parish councils involved in the Thriving Communities UKSPF project, to share ideas and best practices	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch the Thriving Communities project and invite town and parish councils to bid for funding 	X	X	X	X	The UKSPF allocation for the Thriving Communities project has been equally divided between the seven areas included in the project. Each area had £13,484.70 (£94,392.90 in total) to spend during 2023/2024. As at 25 January 2024 there is £2,166.89 left to spend across all areas. Spending has ranged from arranging community events, improving high streets with planters / plants / artwork, cleaning up areas, benches, speed control signs and more.	
Support the development of our visitor economy							
Work with Destination Staffordshire (DMP) to promote our key attractions, accommodation providers and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with DMP to deliver the county-wide visitor economy strategy 	X	X	X	X	Staffordshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) has been accredited by Visit England. The LVEP will act as the successor to the DMP and new governance arrangements and delivery structures are being put in place.	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in joint marketing initiatives and development of themed campaigns 	X	X	X	X	Cannock Chase continues to participate in Enjoy Staffordshire marketing campaigns as part of its membership of the DMP. Focus during quarter 3 has been Christmas events / activities and continuation of '30 days under 30 pounds' campaign.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of Destination Staffordshire investment 				X	Awaiting publication of the Economic Impact Assessment from Destination Staffordshire to inform future decisions on Council investment. LVEP accreditation will require the Council to review new governance and delivery arrangements.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with McArthurGlen on encouraging overnight stay packages in the District 	X	X	X	X	Regular meetings take place to discuss progress at McArthurGlen and opportunities for joint working. McArthurGlen has submitted a reserve matters application for phase 2 of the development and this should be presented to Planning Control Committee during Q4.	
Maximise the legacy of the 2022 Commonwealth Games by using the event to help boost the District's profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore options for new visitor accommodation / eco accommodation to encourage those visiting Cannock Chase Forest to stay in the District 			X	X	Forestry England are continuing to look at options and meeting with Council officers to be set up during Q4	

Priority Delivery Plan for 2023-24

PRIORITY 2 - HEALTH & WELLBEING “To encourage and support residents to lead healthy and independent lives”

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3


				N/A	Total Number of Projects
Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	Action not yet due	
3	9	1	2		15


Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3




Work is due to start on schedule on the Council’s first Bike and Play area at the Stadium Park during Q4, where young people, and people of any age, will be able to develop their cycling skills towards on-road use. Where possible, play area / open space development is being undertaken to include the installation / improvements of circular perimeter pathways, green gyms, and walkways, designed to encourage outdoor activities such as walking, cycling, and running.





Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3





The health and wellbeing strategy is being drafted and will be shared with partners for comment in Q4.

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Provide opportunities for residents to lead healthy and active lifestyles and recognise the importance of mental health and wellbeing							
Work with Inspiring Health Lifestyles (IHL) leisure trust and other stakeholders to deliver campaigns / programmes to promote the benefits of being active and living healthily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with IHL, partners, stakeholders and schools on increasing participation in sports and wellbeing activities and bid for funding where appropriate 	X	X	X	X	<p>Successful 'Staying Well' event held at Chase Leisure Centre, in partnership with Cannock North and Cannock Villages PCN, to promote the IHL sports and wellbeing activities</p> <p>Other activities started this quarter include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working with students from Cannock Chase High to offer taster sessions for activities they may not have tried before - Spin sessions introduced as part of the Pedal to Empower project for participants of the Chase Recovery sessions - Supported Hednesford Valley High School with arts and horticultural activities - Worked with students from Staffordshire University Academy and South Staffordshire College on the Living Colour project - Started 'Cannock Chase Knits Together' with the support of schools, community groups, libraries and community centres <p>£10,000 grant awarded from Awards for All to run an initiative to support vulnerable residents in the District struggling with the cost of living and rising household bills</p>	



Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Promote the use of the Cannock Chase Can online app to support people in leading healthy lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop evaluation tool - Cannock Chase Can portal 		X	X	X	Evaluation tool is currently in development and testing will take place at the end of January 2024	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop new app features and functionality 	X	X	X	X	Developments are ongoing. The Council has been successful in receiving funding to reduce health inequalities which will enable further developments to be made over the next 12 months.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver activities within the community - bespoke projects 	X	X	X	X	Projects ongoing and new projects being developed i.e. alcohol project, healthy eating, Warm Hubs programme, and Treasured Times. A bespoke project for each wellness theme is being explored as part of the above funding.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise Cannock Chase Can showcase event 		X	X	X		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a Cannock Chase Can zone at Hednesford's annual festival 		X	X	X	This took place in Q2	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed Cannock Chase Can into the infrastructure of IHL (Wellbeing offer) 		X	X	X	This is ongoing and work is underway to ensure data can shape future decision making	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a Cannock Chase Can Wellbeing Hub using existing leisure and cultural venues. 		X	X	X	Work is underway to progress this	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Encourage residents to walk or cycle to and from work and school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt and work towards the objectives within the Council's green travel strategy 		X	X	X	The Council is yet to finalise and agree its green travel strategy. However, it is working where it can within its draft objectives. For example, the Local Plan contains over 140 references to cycling and walking. The Council is committed to include cycling and walking facilities into its parks and open spaces, especially around early years learning and general development and training. It has developed a masterplan for Cannock Park to enable local school children and the public to walk and cycle through the park more easily. This will be delivered as part of the development project.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with partners to create attractive and safe walking and cycling routes 	X	X	X	X	Circular pathways and green gym are being included into all new developments where space permits. Play areas that have had new green gyms and routes recently include Laburnum Avenue and Wellington Drive. In addition, Staffordshire County Council continues to develop its roadside cycle ways and pedestrian improvements as per the below.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with schools to promote walking and cycling to school 		X	X		IHL and CCDC officers continue to work with schools and community groups in preparation for the opening of the Stadium bike and play area and look at training opportunities that the new facility will offer.	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities to be identified as part of the planning application process 			X		Staffordshire County Council is continuing to develop the LCWIP plans for the District with the installation of further cycling lanes and improved walking routes along the A34 corridor and around Cannock town centre.	
Deliver lasting legacy projects from the Commonwealth Games' mountain biking event (i.e. Perry's Trail and Pedal and Play trail).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and incorporate cycle and wheeled sports play and areas into play areas / parks where possible 	X	X	X	X	Cycling and wheeled sports play provision to be incorporated in the new masterplans for both Cannock Park and Heath Hayes Park. Groundwork is due to begin on the Bike and Play area at the Stadium park site during Q4.	
Embed health and wellbeing into all of our policies and everything that we do							
Develop a Health and Wellbeing Strategy (HWB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present strategy to Cabinet for adoption 	X	X			A draft health and wellbeing strategy is being produced. It has been delayed due to capacity issues. When the draft is completed, it will be shared with partners for comments before a final strategy is presented.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate strategy actions / milestones into mainstream service delivery. 			X	X	See above	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Work with partners to address health inequalities across the District							
Work with Staffordshire County Council to deliver the Better Health Staffordshire (BHS) Pilot Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide constructive input, advice and assistance with the project to SCC and other partners 	X	X	X	X	IHL is aligning programmes to BHS priorities. The funding that the Council has been allocated to tackle health inequalities will be invested in Cannock Chase Can and further progress the work of BHS.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure opportunities for the Cannock Chase Can initiative and app to contribute to BHS continue to be aired and maximised. 	X	X	X	X	IHL and CCDC have highlighted what initiatives are active that contribute to this agenda.	
Support residents that need our help							
Work with partners to encourage the take up of benefits by residents with low incomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure Service Level and Grant Agreements include support for residents on low incomes 	X				The Citizens Advice Bureau provides a range of support for residents on low incomes and for those in financial difficulty, including benefit take up. Support Staffordshire's work for the year includes ensuring support is provided to residents as a result of the cost of living crisis.	
Work with Support Staffordshire and Staffordshire County Council to support residents who need our help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in partnership working to ensure Cannock Chase residents benefit from support available from county wide organisations and schemes 	X				Distribution of slow cookers to residents who need them took place during Q1	





Item No. 6.19

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Work on fuel poverty with partners, such as Staffordshire Warmer Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Team to identify and assist households suffering fuel poverty, through awareness campaigns and promotion activity 	X	X	X	X	Awareness campaigns and promotion of support and advice available delivered	
Work with partners to safeguard the most vulnerable people within our District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver partnership campaigns to raise awareness of key issues and support pathways for key issues affecting the District 	X	X	X	X	Campaigns are now being delivered by the Commissioner for Police, Fire and Rescue, and Crime and therefore no longer in-house	No longer recorded
Provide funding to voluntary organisations to provide free independent, impartial, and confidential advice to our residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant Agreement in place 	X				Funding provided to Citizens Advice	

Priority Delivery Plan for 2023-24

PRIORITY 3 - THE COMMUNITY “To ensure Cannock Chase is a place that residents are proud to call home”

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

				N/A	Total Number of Projects
Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	Action not yet due	
	14	2		2	18




Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3

Play areas refurbishment is on track with the completion of another two at Barnard Way and Wellington Drive. Relationships continue to grow with the Council’s Friends Groups, some of which have been working alongside officers on play area improvements and parks masterplans. Council officers maintain and develop their work with partners around the ongoing ‘Small Change-Big Difference’ campaign around sustainability and recycling, and are expanding it to look at food waste and waste reduction, going forward.





Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

Work has been delayed on the creation of a Council sustainability strategy due to officer capacity limits and other environmental type works and projects that are being undertaken from within the limited capacity available.

The Local Plan has been delayed with a new timetable approved by Cabinet. This went to Council on 24 January 2024.

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Ensure our neighbourhoods are safe, clean, and tidy							
Engage with young people at risk of engaging in ASB through targeted diversionary activities across the District	Deliver annual programme of diversionary activities across the District	X	X	X	X	Achieving Goalz and Dreams has been commissioned through Locality Deal funding to deliver this initiative. Areas for engagement are determined based upon known peaks / hotspots, with additional flexibility to respond to emerging themes and trends as required. Additional activities / providers have been funded through the ASB Prevention Fund and a full District mapping of activities in currently ongoing.	
Maintain our local parks and green spaces							
Undertake a review of all our play areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out capital play area refurbishments as per the programme 	X	X	X	X	Completion of the following capital parks improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellington Drive play area Barnard Way play area 	
Provide support and opportunities to community groups wishing to take on more responsibility for improving and developing open spaces and play areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve links with existing Friends Groups and create a `Friends of Parks Groups` Strategy 	X	X	X	X	Strengthen links with Brereton Millions and Friends of Cannock Park via masterplan development and parks improvements programme. Continuous quarterly meetings with all friends of groups.	

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Encourage residents to live a sustainable lifestyle							
Work with partners and the local community to support appropriate tree and planting schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with internal and external partners, local schools etc to identify suitable sites for community planting schemes 		X	X	X	Planting carried out at the following sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laburnum Avenue Barnard Way Wellington Drive 	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out community planting at suitable identified sites 			X	X	Two native hedges row planting projects have been identified in Heath Hayes Park and Cannock Park. Planting is due to be started during January - February with approximately 30 people involved at each of the sites.	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look to create wild planting areas on parks and open spaces 	X	X	X	X	Created wildflower mounds and planting at Wellington Drive as part of the play area and open space development	✓
Undertake campaigns to raise awareness of the ways in which residents can reduce their impact on the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out annual waste reduction / recycling / climate change campaigns 	X	X	X	X	Officers have been researching food waste and the upcoming Food Waste Action Week. They have been working on an upcoming campaign to educate residents and encourage resident take up when food waste collections are launched nationally in 2026. In addition to the above officers continued to work on garden waste and Christmas campaigns during Q3.	✓

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with schools, other educational establishments, and partners, to promote sustainability, environment, and climate change awareness 		X	X		Officers have been working with partners including IHL, the Globe Foundation and the House of Fairy Tales in the Great Imagining Cannock Chase event to be held on 8 and 9 March 2024. Prior to the event, artists will be going into schools as a continuation of the small change big difference campaign.	
Develop a Sustainability Strategy and action plan to reduce the Council's impact on the climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a Council Sustainability Strategy 			X		Work on the Council's Sustainability Strategy has been held up due to officer capacity. The limited capacity available has been taken by other, mainly environmental type, works and projects.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work towards the objectives of the Council's sustainability strategy 			X	X	See above	
Encouragement of District wide Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with local government and external partners on improving the District's sustainability and lowering its carbon emissions 	X	X	X	X	Continuing to work alongside all other Staffordshire councils as part of the Staffordshire Sustainability Board. As an example, the Council is also working with the Globe Foundation on Staffordshire's COP24, the Energy Saving Trust on taxi engagement and moves towards ULEV, and the Forest of Mercia CIC to develop and implement tree planting schemes within Council parks as part of their refurbishment.	





Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Improve the housing offer across the District							
Increase housing choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver sufficient supply of homes to provide for housing choice and ensure all people are able to live in a decent home 	X	X	X	X	Policies on housing choice and a proposed uplift in the delivery of affordable housing have been included in the Regulation 19 Local Plan.	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help meet local need for a wide variety of housing, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ affordable dwellings; and ○ aspirational housing 	X	X	X	X	Affordable Housing as well as aspirational housing policies are set out within Reg19 Local Plan	✓
Work with other housing providers and landlords to ensure that their properties are safe and healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update policies and procedures, as legislation is updated, changes and / or is created in relation to health and safety in public and private sector housing 	X	X	X	X	Successful bid submitted for funding of housing projects dedicated to identifying and addressing key health issues within private sector housing	✓
Ensure our communities are well designed, accessible, and have inclusive environments							
Adopt a new Local Plan for the District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council approval and Submission to Secretary of State for examination spring 2023 	X				New LDS approved at Cabinet in December and went to full Council on 24 January 2024. Revised date Summer 2024	✓
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination in Public summer 2023 		X			New LDS approved at Cabinet in December and went to full Council on 24 January 2024. Revised date Autumn / Winter 2024	✓

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Support and build strong connections within our local communities							
Work with partners to support community events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular meetings with town and parish councils 		X		X	Final action not yet due	N/A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify options for supporting community events 				X	Action not yet due	N/A

Priority Delivery Plan for 2023-24

PRIORITY 4 - RESPONSIBLE COUNCIL “To be a modern, forward thinking and responsible Council”

Summary of Progress as at end of Quarter 3

				N/A	Total Number of Projects
Action completed	Work on target	Work < 3 months behind schedule	Work > 3 months behind schedule	Action not yet due	
2	4	3	3		12






Summary of Successes as at Quarter 3

The new customer portal went live on 6 December 2023. Further processes are to be added in Q4 and throughout 2024/25.


Summary of Slippage as at Quarter 3

There has been slippage on the transformation work due to capacity issues. Funding for additional capacity has been included within the budget for 2024/25 which will help to address some of the issues.




Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
Improve our customers' access to services							
Develop a new customer portal to deliver better access to services online	Implementation of new system - Phase 1		X			The new system went live last December with the introduction of garden waste permits.	★
	Development of new e-forms and processes - Phase 2			X	X	Forms for Council Tax and Housing Benefits have been developed and will go live in January 2024. The system will continue to be developed in 2024/25.	✓
Enhance the use of technology and new ways of working							
Update our digital technology strategy and plan future improvements	Review of digital strategy and development of action plan	X				The digital strategy is with the Deputy Chief Executive - Resources for review, but has been delayed due to work on the budget	✗
Develop our workforce to ensure they are suitably skilled							
Develop and deliver a workforce plan	Overarching framework for workforce plan to be developed		X			Cabinet has approved deferring this to 2024/25	Deferred
	Review of the trial of the hybrid working model and policy development	X				The review of the pilot has slipped due to capacity issues within the HR team. The intention is to complete this in Q1 2024/25.	✗
Be a responsible Council that lives within its means and is accountable for its actions							
Set a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	• A rolling MTFS produced each year	X	X	X	X	The Medium Term Financial Strategy has been produced and is due to be approved by Council in February 2024	★
	• Delivery of savings for the budgets for 23/24 and 24/25	X	X	X	X	A significant proportion of the savings have been delivered in 23/24 and others have been re-profiled as part of the MTFS for 24/25	✓

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation and transformation of shared services, including the delivery of savings 	X	X	X	X	The restructure of the service manager tier has been delayed slightly but consultation will commence in Q4	
Make the best use of our assets							
Undertake a corporate wide review of our assets and develop a new Asset Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake a programme of strategic review of the Council's non-HRA land and property assets 	X	X			An initial review has been undertaken and a number of assets are undergoing an options appraisal. Progress with the Asset Management Strategy is now paused pending wider review of one combined strategy with SBC	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the business case to create a new Civic Hub in Cannock town centre as part of the Levelling Up Fund scheme 		X			The plans for a new civic hub are being considered alongside the review of the scope of the LUF scheme.	
Identify opportunities for funding for green initiatives to improve energy efficiency of our buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an Energy Management Strategy 	X				An Energy Management Strategy for CCDC was presented to LT last July. This document will be reviewed following a wider review of the Asset Management & Sustainability Strategy	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop asset management plans 			X	X	The Asset Management Strategy was approved by Cabinet in June 2022 - the Strategy needs to be refreshed and Asset Management Plans need to be prioritised and programmed in.	

Item No. 6.29

Projects	Actions and Milestones	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr4	Progress Update	Symbol
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="481 220 853 363">Identify `green` funding opportunities to support asset requirements 	X	X	X	X	Lighting being replaced with new LED low energy fittings when existing lights fail. As part of the electricity utility supply contract, a green energy option has been chosen. Awaiting outcome of funding request for the installation of solar PV on the leisure centres.	

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2023/24 - as at end of Quarter 3

Symbol	Description	Number of KPIs
	Performance exceeds target	9
	Performance on target	4
	Performance below target	5


KPIs for Priority 1 - Economic Prosperity

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year End	Symbol	Comments
Planning								
Major Planning Applications determined within time	60%	N/A	100%	100%			★	
Non-major Planning Applications determined within time	70%	96.6%	95.5%	92.4%			★	
Building Control								
Applications registered and acknowledged within 3 days of valid receipt	90%	100%	98%	100%			★	
Full plans applications with initial full assessment within 15 days of valid receipt	70%	95%	92%	93%			★	

KPIs for Priority 2 - Health and Wellbeing







Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year	Symbol	Comments
Leisure								
Number of leisure and wellbeing service users	Out-turn (2022/23) 795,897	214,714	197,575	197,740			✓	
Number of individuals engaged through Cannock Chase Can activities and initiatives, including the app	N/A	1,092 app users	1,263 app users	1,387 app users			N/A	There were also 1,235 attendances at events over the quarter



KPIs for Priority 3 - The Community

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year	Symbol	Comments
Waste Collection								
% Household waste sent for re-use, recycling and composting <i>Breakdown:</i> <i>Recycling (dry)</i> <i>Composting (garden)</i>	50%	50.30%	41.55%	40.52%				Dry recycling performance remains high, however, quarter 3 performance has been affected by a poor end to the growing season, with lower than expected garden waste tonnage. The national average recycling figure currently stands at around 44%.
Missed bin collections (including assisted)	2021-22 out-turn 732	140	204	152			N/A	
Environmental Health								
% of food businesses inspected which are broadly compliant (rating of 3 or better)	N/A	98%	97%	98%			N/A	
Homelessness								
% of homeless cases resolved through prevention assessed under prevention duty	N/A	71%	55%	47%			N/A	Case dependent and previously more cases incorrectly judged as prevention rather than relief, this has been corrected over time More cases have been taken this year than last, reflecting increased occurrences of homelessness in the District, mainly driven by private sector affordability issues and section 21 notices

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year	Symbol	Comments
% of homeless cases assessed under relief duty	N/A	29%	45%	53%			N/A	As above.
Housing								
Rent collected as proportion of rent due	100%	98.74%	97.04%	99.31%			✓	Improved Q3 performance on rent collection (includes difficult Christmas period where collection usually dips slightly), on target to achieve 100% at year end
Rent arrears - former tenants (FTA)	£500,000	£453,302	£459,514	£452,041			★	
Average re-let time for Voids	52	46.10	43.30	33.87			★	Another improved quarter for re-let performance. Long term void re-lets all cleared and procedures back on track
% emergency repairs completed in time	100%	100%	100%	100%			✓	

KPIs for Priority 4 - Responsible Council

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year	Symbol	Comments
Local Taxation and Benefits								
Days taken to process new HB / CT Claims	20 days	37.6	40.2	21.9				Much improved performance as the training of our new starters starts to produce tangible results.
Days taken to process new HB / CT change of circumstances	9 days	8.3	7.8	5.4				
% of Council Tax collected annually	98% by year end	28.0%	54.7%	81.6%				
% National non-domestic rates (NNDR) collected	98% by year end	25.7%	54.2%	80.1%				Very slightly below target of 81% collected at same time last year. We would expect to overturn this in Q4.
Land Charges Searches								
Turnaround time for land charges searches (excluding personal searches) - average no. of working days	10 working days	12.54	11.62	8.77				
Calls, Complaints and FOI requests								
% of calls answered	94%	94.9%	93.7%	81.6%				The team experienced a significant increase in calls during December as a result of the new charge for garden waste. 2060 calls were taken were chargeable garden waste which accounts for 30% of all calls taken in December.

Indicator	Target	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Year	Symbol	Comments
Average call wait time	2 min	1.02min	1.18min	2.53min				The team experienced a significant increase in calls during December as a result of the new charge for garden waste
Complaints received and upheld:							N/A	
Total stage 1 complaints		15	15	10				
<i>Upheld in full</i>		3	3	6				
<i>Upheld in part</i>		0	3	1				
Total stage 2 complaints		3	3	4				
<i>Upheld in full</i>		0	1	0				
<i>Upheld in part</i>		1	1	0				
FOI requests within time i.e. 20 working days	85%	89%	79%	90%				

Revenues and Benefits Collection Report - Quarter 3

Committee:	CCDC
Date of Meeting:	29 February 2024
Report of:	Deputy Chief Executive - Resources
Portfolio:	Resources and Transformation

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the performance of the Revenues and Benefits Service as regards:
- The collection of Council Tax during the first three quarters of the financial year.
 - The collection of Business Rates during the first three quarters of the financial year.
 - The recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit during the first three quarters of the financial year.
- 1.2 To seek approval to the write off of the arrears listed in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDICES**

2 Reason(s) for Appendices being 'Not for Publication'

- 2.1 In accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the appendices to the report are considered 'not for publication' under the following categories of exemption:
- Exempt Paragraph 1 - Information relating to any individual.
 - Exempt Paragraph 2 - Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
 - Exempt Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council).

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That the information regarding collections be noted.
- 3.2 That the arrears listed in the **CONFIDENTIAL APPENDICES** be written off.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.3 Efficient collection of the Council's revenues is of major importance to the funding of Council services and those provided by our preceptors.

- 3.4 Whilst our collection rates are traditionally good, regrettably not all of the monies owed to the Council can be collected and this report contains a recommendation to write off bad debts which cannot be recovered.

4 Key Issues

- 4.1 Council Tax due for the 2023/2024 year amounts to £63.1M of which some **81.6%** was collected by the end of December. This is slightly better than last year's performance in the same period (80.5%).
- 4.2 Business Rates due for the current year amounts to £37.0M of which some **80.1%** was collected by the end of December, showing a decrease on the previous year (81.0%). Reasons for this are explained below.

5 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6 Report Detail

6.1 Council Tax

- 6.1.1 Council Tax is collected on behalf of the District Council, Parish Councils and our Major Preceptors (Staffordshire County Council and Commissioner for Police, Crime, Fire and Rescue). The effect of the Collection fund arrangements means that Cannock Chase Council retains around 12.4% of the council tax collected.
- 6.1.2 Council Tax due for the current year amounts to £63.1M and we have collected 81.6% within the first three quarters of the year. This compares well to the 80.5% at the corresponding time last year and whilst lower than pre-pandemic levels indicates (82.1%) improvement towards the levels that we would want to achieve.
- 6.1.3 In accordance with the Council's approved policies, all reasonable and lawful attempts are made to recover all amounts due. In the first instance this involves the issue of bills, reminders and final notices, followed by Summonses in the Magistrates Court where the warning notices are not effective. At all stages of this process, debtors are encouraged to engage in voluntary arrangements to repay their arrears, to prevent the need for formal action.

Where necessary and when Liability Orders are granted by Magistrates, the Council uses its powers to make deductions from earnings and benefits of debtors, where it can, and instructs Enforcement Agents where such deductions are not possible or appropriate.

In the most severe cases and for debts exceeding £5,000, the Council will consider personal bankruptcy action against individuals.

- 6.1.4 The recovery powers available to the Council are considerable but not completely infallible. Some of the limitations which lead to debts being written off are described below.
- 6.1.5 Statutory safeguards such as Debt Relief Orders, Individual's Voluntary Arrangements exist to protect debtors suffering hardship, to attempt to the expensive, stressful and sometimes ineffective process of personal bankruptcy.

Where a debt is included in such an instrument, or when a debtor is bankrupt, our ordinary recovery powers cannot be used.

- 6.1.6 For any of our powers to be effective we need to know the whereabouts of a debtor and this is not always the case. Where debtors abscond we will use all reasonable endeavours to trace them and are often successful in doing so. Unfortunately, on occasions this is not so and we must submit a debt for write off.

Our trace procedures include;

- Checking our internal Council systems, and following any information which may help us to trace the debtor.
- Use of credit reference agency data.
- Trace and collect facilities offered by our Enforcement Agencies
- Visits to the last known address by the Council's Property Inspector and use of external tracing agents.

Unfortunately, legislation does not currently permit access to DWP or HMRC records to trace Council Tax debtors or their employers, though a Cabinet Office project is currently reviewing this.

Data protection legislation allows us to receive information as to a debtor's whereabouts but we cannot disclose information to other creditors. Reciprocal arrangements with utility companies and similar are not therefore workable.

- 6.1.7 3 Irrecoverable council tax debts in the sum of £11,248.69 are listed in the confidential appendix 1 to this report.

6.2 Business Rates

- 6.2.1 Business rates income forms a part of the Council's core funding, with around 29% of receipts being retained by this Council. The remainder is collected on behalf of Central Government and our major preceptors.
- 6.2.2 Business Rates due for the current year amounts to £37.0M of which some **80.1%** was collected by the end of December. This represents a decrease on last year's performance of 81.0%). The reasons for this are related to activity in September 2022, which boosted the collection rate in that and subsequent months. Government funded rate relief known as Covid Additional Relief Funding (CARF) was applied to a number of rate accounts in September 2022. This had the effect of reducing the collectable debit by 1.7% and so increasing the collection rate by a similar amount. Had this not happened our December 2023 year performance would have been better than last year, as has been the case throughout the year.
- 6.2.3 The recovery powers available to us are again contained in the Council's approved policies and are used in full. Those powers and our procedures are similar to the council tax powers described above, with the exception that deduction from individuals' benefits and earnings are not permissible, even if the debtor is an individual.
- 6.2.4 Where rates are owed by an individual, similar safeguards exist for the debtors and trace facilities are used by the Council for absconding debtors, as described above.

6.2.5 Additionally, in the case of business rates, as has been reported to Cabinet previously, our collection efforts are sometimes frustrated by weaknesses in legislation. Rates are due from the occupiers rather than the owners of property and where the occupier is a company, we can only recover from that company. Some proprietors will strip a company of its assets, or dissolve the company before we have had an opportunity to implement our recovery procedures. A new company is then formed in a similar style, to trade from the same premises.

Central Government has previously undertaken to review the loopholes that exist in rating and company legislation, though no changes have yet been received. Your officers continue to actively monitor these issues.

6.2.6 11 Irrecoverable business rates debts in the sum of £364,405.24 are listed in the confidential appendix 2 to this report.

6.3 Housing Benefit Overpayments

6.3.1 The Council manages the Housing Benefit scheme on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, who fund the cost of benefits paid to claimants.

6.3.2 Sometimes a claimant will be paid too much Housing Benefit, for example when the Council does not become aware of a change of circumstances until after the claimant has been paid the benefit. This is called an Overpayment of Housing Benefit. The Council is expected to recover these overpayments from the claimant in all but a few limited circumstances. DWP will fund only 40% of benefit which is overpaid as a result of claimant error or fraud.

6.3.3 Where an overpayment occurs as a result of a local authority error, DWP will provide 100% funding provided our error rate remains below a threshold of 0.48% of benefit paid, as it has routinely done for many years.

6.3.4 Recovery of overpaid Housing Benefit continues to progress well, with some £319,830.02 being collected into the Council's General Fund in the first three quarters of the financial year.

6.3.5 There are 9 irrecoverable Benefit Overpayment debts totalling £44,496.81 included in the confidential appendix 3 to this report.

7 Implications

7.1 Financial

Under the Business Rates Retention Scheme, business rates write offs will no longer be offset against the National Non-Domestic Rating Pool. Write offs will now form part of the costs of collection of business rates.

Council Tax write offs are losses to the Collection Fund and, as such, form part of the cost of collection incurred by this Council. The Council Tax write-offs on this report are 3 cases totalling £11,248.69. This represents approximately 0.02% of the outstanding collectable debit as at the 1 April 2023.

The amounts being recommended are well below the value of the bad debt provision, which the Council includes within its accounts in expectation that some amounts owed will not be paid and cannot be recovered.

The cost of collecting the debts has been considered as part of the decision to put them forward for write off. If further information does come forward about the whereabouts of any of the individual debtors the Council will pursue recovery action.

Cabinet are asked to write off the debts as they are considered to be irrecoverable for the reasons given in the appendices. The debts remain legally due to the Council and should the circumstances causing the write off in any particular case, subsequently change, recovery action may be recommenced.

7.2 Legal

Cabinet are asked to write off the debts as they are considered to be irrecoverable for the reasons given in the appendices. The debts remain legally due to the Council and should the circumstances causing the write off in any particular case, subsequently change, recovery action may be recommenced.

7.3 Human Resources

None

7.4 Risk Management

The risk issues contained in this report are not strategic and therefore should not be included in the Strategic Risk Register.

7.5 Equalities and Diversity

None

7.6 Health

None

7.7 Climate Change

None

8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Council Tax write offs over £1,000

Appendix 2: Business Rate write offs over £1,000

Appendix 3: Housing Benefit Overpayment write offs over £1,000

9 Previous Consideration

None

10 Background Papers

None

Contact Officer: Rob Wolfe
Telephone Number: 01543 464 397
Report Track: Cabinet: 29/02/24
Key Decision: No