

## **Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 20 April 2022**

### **Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 4, 2021/22**



**Cllr Alan White, Leader of the Council said,**

“Dealing with Covid-19 and learning how to live safely with the virus remains a priority and we continue to do what is required to keep people safe. The vaccine programme has been a game changer and vaccination uptake in Staffordshire remains comparatively good with booster uptake now above the national average.

“We continue to do what is necessary to support those who need us most, including vulnerable residents, the care sector, local communities and businesses. Growing our economy, creating better quality jobs and supporting local businesses with their recovery through the Staffordshire Means Back to Business Programme remains a priority. Putting more money in people’s pockets and improving their financial security, especially at a time when living and energy costs are on the increase, is vital.

“The cost of adult social care continues to rise, and we face challenges in the sector although we have seen a reduction in waiting times for assessments since last quarter. We continue to address workforce issues through the Future Social Care Workforce Programme, which is in its early days, but will help us to understand current local issues and needs.

“The new model for the delivery of our Children and Families services introduced last year continues to embed well and our work through the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme continues to support vulnerable families. An Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection of SEND provision in January found improvements in six out of eight areas under review, with two areas requiring further development. Work continues to make improvements within the service.

“The Warmer Home schemes have provided significant benefits to Staffordshire residents, especially given the rising price of energy. To date 3,500 people have accessed the schemes and received help and advice. This includes 511 families benefitting from 566 home installations, such as gas central heating, replacement boilers or insulation measures.

“Despite the pressures facing councils like ours, we will invest to keep growing the county in a sustainable way to make a positive difference in the lives of our residents. We want Staffordshire people to enjoy a better quality of life, in thriving communities, and live longer in good health.

“In much more sobering news, we continue to be horrified by the events unfolding in Ukraine and as a county we stand with all those affected by the conflict. Staffordshire has a proud history of helping those who have had no choice but to flee war or persecution. We have set up an Incident Management Team and we are supporting the delivery of the ‘Homes for Ukraine’ scheme. We stand ready to offer Ukrainian refugees a warm welcome to our county should our help be needed.”



**Cllr Ian Parry, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources said,**

“All council departments continue to deliver against their priorities, whilst progressing with activities in the organisation’s Delivery Plan.

“The latest revenue forecast outturn shows a forecast saving of £4.417m (0.8%). This is compared to the previous forecast of a saving of £3.963m (0.7%) at Quarter 3.

“Like many local authorities, we still face financial challenges including in adult social care and in children’s social services, but we continue to keep our finances in as strong a position as possible. Well managed finances ensures that we provide good value for money for local tax-payers and means we can continue to invest in our future and growing our economy.”

## **Report Summary**

This quarterly Integrated Performance Report provides an overview of Staffordshire County Council’s progress, performance, and financial position in delivering against our Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan.

## **Recommendation**

We recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Notes and challenges performance and advises of any further information and/or action required.
- b. Approves the use of £2.702m from the Contingency budget to fund the national pay award relating to 2021/22. This is not currently included in service budgets as a pay freeze was assumed during the MTFS.

<b>Local Members Interest</b>
N/A

## **Cabinet – Wednesday 20 April 2022**

### **Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 4, 2021/22**

#### **Recommendation of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources**

We recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Notes and challenges performance and advises of any further information and/or action required.
- b. Approves the use of £2.702m from the Contingency budget to fund the national pay award relating to 2021/22. This is not currently included in service budgets as a pay freeze was assumed during the MTFS.

#### **Report of the Director for Corporate Services**

##### **Reasons for Recommendations**

This is an opportunity for Cabinet to consider and discuss Staffordshire County Council's quarterly performance and finance position.



# Quarter 4 Summary

Performance ratings for the individual service areas across the council are as follows:

Service Area	Delivery	Finance
Health & Care	A	G
Families & Communities	A	A
Economy, Infrastructure & Skills	G	G
Corporate Services	G	G

## Key highlights

- Shortlisted for LGC Council of the Year Award 2022.
- Shift in COVID approach to 'living safely with COVID'; good vaccination rates.
- Additional £19.25m non-recurrent funding for investment in Staffordshire has been confirmed for the NHS and Social Care for 2022/23 – 2023/24.
- Staffordshire Means Back to Business Programme continues to succeed for Staffordshire's businesses.
- Staffordshire has been confirmed as a continued Earned Autonomy area for the Supporting Families Programme in 2022/23.

## Key challenges

- Implementation of Adult Social Care Reform by April 2023 – project in place which will require significant resource.
- Overall demand remains high for adult social care assessments, leading to capacity issues and waiting lists, although some improvement in Quarter 4.
- Continued pressures relating to the number and complexity of children in care.
- Capacity issues in SEND due to need for Accelerated Progress Plan by April 2022; also declining Education, Health and Care plan timeliness.
- Continuing to develop and manage Staffordshire's waste services.

Further details of the above can be found in the main report and accompanying appendices.

## 1. Summary

This report provides an update on Quarter 4 activities for each service area: Health and Care; Families and Communities; Economy, Infrastructure and Skills; and Corporate Services.

Significant progress has been made across the organisation during Quarter 4, however challenges remain in relation to capacity and demand, particularly within Health and Care and Families and Communities. There also continues to be areas of financial risk in Adult Social Care and Families and Communities, with further details included within this report and its appendices.

The latest revenue forecast outturn shows a forecast saving of £4.417m (0.8%). There are a number of potential carry forward requests to be made in the Final Outturn report, if all these requests are approved this will reduce the saving to £2.503m (0.4%). This is compared to the previous forecast of a saving of £3.963m (0.7%) at Quarter 3.

## 2. Health and Care

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
Amber	Green

3. Considerable progress has been made across Health and Care in Quarter 4, both in leading the council's move to living safely with COVID and in the recovery of key adult social care services, with an AMBER delivery overall to reflect a number of ongoing challenges, including the implementation of key adult social care reform. The GREEN finance rating reflects significant in-year underspend, despite longer term cost pressures.



4. In Staffordshire, work to implement the Government's new plan for adult social care reform, including a lifetime cap on the amount anyone in England will need to spend on their personal care, is a key area of challenge. The council has commenced a project to understand, design and implement the necessary process and system changes required for Adult Social Care Reform, including implementing the fair cost of care and the lifetime cap on care costs. Like all other local authorities, significant resource will be required to implement the necessary changes by April 2023.

5. Following the national trend, overall demand remains high for adult social care assessments, leading to capacity issues and waiting lists, although there has been some improvement in Quarter 4, with waiting lists

reducing from their peak and improvements in terms of capacity. Capacity improvements in home care are particularly due to focused work with partners in relation to retention of staff, which has mitigated the risk over winter.

6. In the longer term, workforce issues are looking to be addressed by the Future Social Care Workforce Programme, which is in its early days, but will help to understand current local social care sector issues. The programme will work with sector representatives and develop approaches across the partnership to address the identified issues.
7. Brokerage demand remains high with levels consistently above 'pre-Covid' levels (22% higher in February 2022 compared with February/March 2020). Overall timeliness of sourcing has however improved to 70% in February compared to 63% in January. Home/day care sourcing has improved from 59% to 71%, although issues continue for a number of care homes temporarily in lockdown and declining new admissions. Care homes timeliness of sourcing is marginally down from 73% in January 2022 to 69% in February 2022.
8. The council's response to COVID-19 is adapting to align with the Government's shift to 'living with COVID'. There will continue to be ongoing management of outbreaks in high risks settings and there is a need to ensure contingency plans and resources are in place in case there is a surge in cases. Positively, vaccination uptake in Staffordshire remains comparatively good. As of 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent recorded a booster uptake of 84.1%, compared to the national average of 81%. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have got the highest uptake for 12–15-year-olds for the first dose across the region at 64.2%. In Staffordshire alone it's 67.5%.
9. With the cost of living increases that are being experienced nationally, Staffordshire has measures in place to help those residents facing financial hardship. One of these measures is the delivery of the Warmer Homes Scheme, which aims to combat fuel poverty across the county and help residents to heat their homes. The scheme is for those residents in receipt of means tested or disability benefits, e.g. Universal Credit, Disability Living Allowance, or on low incomes. The council has recently undertaken further work to understand where Staffordshire's most in need families live, allowing for more targeted campaigns to raise awareness of the scheme in those areas.
10. The current Warmer Home schemes are ending in Quarter 1, 2022/23 and have provided significant benefits to Staffordshire residents, especially given the rising price of energy. As of mid-March 2022, 511 households had benefitted from 566 home installations, such as gas central heating, replacement boilers or insulation measures to ensure houses are kept warm, and over 2,300 people had received wrap around

services through 'Beat the Cold', which include eligibility testing, advice and signposting to further support. Anecdotally, these figures have already increased substantially and will be included in the next report. For those receiving first time central heating, average savings on energy bills have been £657 per year. Households across all districts in Staffordshire have benefitted from the scheme. Of those measures installed, there has been the highest take-up in Tamworth (122), Cannock (100), Stafford (94) and East Staffordshire (69). These are also the districts that have had the highest level of take-up of wrap around services. The focus during 2022/23 will primarily be on the Sustainable Warmth Competition, which helps local authorities to upgrade energy inefficient homes of low-income households and will target around 400 homes in 2022/23, plus the continued wrap-around services. This is subject to £5.9m funding which is anticipated to be approved by the end of April 2022.

11. The Supportive Communities programme has continued to progress during Quarter 4. The programme has started developing a long-term model for voluntary sector provision of unregulated social care support, which will help with the demand and capacity issues faced in Social Care. The Community Help Point referral rate is also continuing to improve. A model and vision for strengths-based working is developing across Health and Care, with a locality focused approach being developed initially in Newcastle followed by Staffordshire Moorlands.

12. From a Finance perspective, the Health and Care forecasted outturn at Quarter 4 is a saving of £1.176m, compared to a £0.982m saving in Quarter 3. There remains a range of high-risk Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) savings within this area, with the directorate seeking alternative savings where necessary. In addition, the level of client debt is above target and work is ongoing to recover this. The forecast financial impact of COVID-19 for the directorate is £3.644m.

### 13. Families and Communities

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
Amber	Amber

14. Significant progress has been made across the Families and Communities service area in Quarter 4. The overall AMBER performance ratings reflect much work that has taken place during the quarter, balanced with managing some key issues in relation to demand and capacity.



15. Staffordshire has continued to experience pressures relating to the number and complexity of children in care, as well as challenges associated with the embedding of a large-scale Children's

Transformation. Work to embed the workforce structure continues; leadership and senior management roles have now been filled and wider transformation elements (policy, digital, Power BI) are now live and embedding well. Refurbishment works on the council's new in-house residential unit remain on track for completion by the end of March 2022.

16. At the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022, there were 1,277 children in care in Staffordshire, which represents very little change compared to the position reported in Quarter 3 (1,279), however this remains slightly higher than the revised business case number. The rate is 74.6 per 10,000 which is higher than the most recent national benchmark (67 per 10,000 - March 2021) but lower than the regional benchmark (85 per 10,000 - March 2021). In Staffordshire the council has provided crucial placements to 21 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as part of the Government's National Transfer Scheme, which continues to place additional pressures on all local authorities with children's services.
17. The number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) issued in time (within 20 weeks) in Staffordshire has declined during Quarter 4. In February 2022, 30% of EHCPs were issued in time, compared to the most recent national benchmark of 56% (from 2020/21). The overall 12-month position is at 69%, compared to the most recent national benchmark of 56%. Half of the plans 'out of time' were issued within 25 weeks. The issue around timeliness is linked to securing keyworkers following the changes during the transformation. To address this, and the overall increase in demand for EHCPs - which is being experienced nationally, the council has increased the SEND Keyworker FTE from 28 to 35, resulting in less reliance on agency staff. All new keyworker roles have been recruited, but they have not all started yet. Performance of this key measure is also continuing to be closely monitored by the SEND Service and District Operations Teams.
18. In January 2022 the council also had its Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection of SEND provision in the county, which found improvements in six out of eight areas under review, with two areas requiring further development in the next 12 months, through an Accelerated Progress Plan. These areas of development include improving both the relationships with families and the quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Changes already planned include developing a recently launched Parent Carer Forum to identify problems and solutions more quickly and working on a national pilot scheme with the Council for Disabled Children to measure the impact of the changes being made.
19. Work has continued to co-produce a new Staffordshire Early Help Strategy with the involvement of children and their families. This joint strategy, developed with key partners, is due to be in place from April 2022. Work is also ongoing to finalise the Early Help & Place Based

Approach Implementation Plan which will underpin delivery of the refreshed Early Help Strategy.

20. Following a standard 10-year review of the agreement between the council and Entrust, a small number of services currently provided by Entrust to the council will be brought back in-house by April 2023. These services include skills and employability, early years support and other property projects. This reflects the changing school landscape in the county and new council priorities. Services Entrust provides directly to schools will remain largely unaffected.
21. More than nine out of ten parents have been allocated their first-choice secondary school in Staffordshire. Out of the 7,964 offers for a secondary school in Staffordshire made to parents, 93.5% were allocated their first-choice school. This is compared to 7,650 applications made for a school place in 2021. Around 98% have been allocated one of their top three preferred schools, above the national average which stands at 93% (2021).
22. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) have confirmed Staffordshire will continue to be an Earned Autonomy area for the Supporting Families Programme in 2022/23. In Quarter 4, the council achieved successful outcomes for a further 232 families, taking the total for the year to 1,238 and exceeding its annual DLUHC target of 817.
23. The council has administered over £12 million in the last 12 months to assist people facing financial hardship through the Household Support Fund and other grants made available to the council. These funds have been used primarily to support households most in need with food, energy costs and other bills. The grants have helped over 100,000 people with food vouchers, including children who are entitled to Free School Meals and Care Leavers, and 2,616 households have had support with energy bills. Within the Spring Statement it was announced that the Household Support fund would be extended from the 1st April to 30th September 2022 to continue to support those in need. Further details around the funding and distribution will be included in the next report.
24. From the 22<sup>nd</sup> March, parents of eligible children in Staffordshire can register for a space on the council's [Easter Holiday Activities and Food Programme \(HAF\)](#). All HAF programmes over the Christmas holidays were delivered despite COVID-19 risks and with more than 20,000 places available across Staffordshire, the Easter programme will offer 67 inclusive activities and healthy meals over the school holidays for children aged 5-16 years.
25. The Staffordshire Resilience Forum is working to plan and prepare Staffordshire's partnership response to the Ukraine crisis. The council has

also established an Incident Management Team, including council senior managers, to help respond to the crisis. The council are also currently supporting the Home Office and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to deliver a new scheme 'Homes for Ukraine.' The scheme sees local people ('sponsors') offer a bedroom in their home for a Ukrainian fleeing war, with checks in place to ensure the safety of the guests. The scheme is being developed across the partnership to ensure that they have access to community support, schools, work, and wider support to help them integrate in Staffordshire. Further work is also taking place to prepare for potential health needs. As of 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022, there were 144 Staffordshire sponsors who had come forward and agreed to accommodate a total of 370 Ukrainians.

26. A key priority for the council is the provision of domestic abuse services (the council contributes to a jointly commissioned service). Work remains on track to ensure new commissioning arrangements are in place from April 2023, with funding of over £1.5m to support victims and their families living in safe accommodation for 2022/23 awarded during Quarter 4.

27. The Trading Standards team continues to support businesses through safeguarding and compliance advice. Since April 2021 the team have dealt with almost 16,900 engagements and interventions with businesses; with almost £750,000 prevented from being lost to scams and fraud through the council's intervention.

28. Between October and December 2021, the council's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Strategic Capacity Building Partner saw 226 organisations provided with one-to-one development support, c.£1.3m external funding secured by VCSE organisations and 33 individuals supported to access local volunteering opportunities. In addition, the tender for the new VCSE Capacity Building Framework went live on 31st January, with a deadline for applications of 7th March. Evaluation of bids is currently underway, with a go-live date for the new arrangements of 1st August.

29. In terms of the financial position at Quarter 4 for Families & Communities, there is a forecast overspend of £1.357m, compared to an overspend of £1.313m in Quarter 3. Whilst there are various savings which are mainly to do with vacancies the pressure on Children in our Care leads to an overall overspend. The forecast financial impact of COVID-19 for the directorate is £8.400m.

### 30. **Economy, Infrastructure and Skills**

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
Green	Green

31. Economy, Infrastructure and Skills is currently on track in terms of both Delivery and Finance in Quarter 4. The overall GREEN performance ratings reflect considerable progress made across the service against its key plans, whilst continuing to respond to some key challenges.



32. A key area of focus within the service is in relation to the Hanford Waste Disposal Facility. Discussions with Stoke-on-Trent City Council are ongoing to ensure that there is a cost effective and sustainable waste disposal solution for household residual waste in the north of Staffordshire post 2025.

33. Work is on track to bring the day-to-day management and running of Staffordshire's Household Waste Recycling Centres back in-house from April 2022. Risks have been mitigated against and staff have been supported to transition from AMEY. Residents should experience no immediate difference with this changeover, although it is hoped in the short-term improvements to facilities and encouragement of more advanced recycling methods will be noticeable.

34. The council continues to support local businesses to survive, adapt and continue to operate as part of delivering its £6m Staffordshire Means Back to Business Support Scheme, which is a unique partnership with Staffordshire's eight boroughs and districts to prioritise support for small businesses and people whose jobs and employment prospects have been impacted.

35. As part of the Back to Business scheme, the Staffordshire Apprentice 500 initiative launched in April 2021 to provide incentives to small and non-levy employers to provide apprenticeships to Staffordshire's young unemployed residents. Between the launch and February 2022, 195 applications have been approved, creating over 300 apprenticeships and over 250 apprentices have so far been recruited.

36. The Staffordshire Start-Up Loan scheme is assisting those made redundant or unemployed to start up new businesses with loans of between £3,000 and £5,000, with no interest or fees. By the end of February 2022, 21 start-up businesses were supported through the scheme at a total of £101,000 with 3 businesses having paid back to the council after 12 months. The Staffordshire Start-Up course (delivered through Staffordshire Chamber) is also progressing. At the end of February 2022, 361 people had signed up to the course and nearly 43% had started trading.

37. The Get Started scheme which launched in November 2021 gives participants extra confidence to launch or continue with their enterprise with the backing of free expert professional support. The scheme is

proving extremely popular with 123 applications received by the end of February 2022.

38. The council has developed a new Economic Strategy that will help to strengthen partnerships with district and borough councils and other organisations, in addition to influencing central Government and attracting investors. Main priorities include the regeneration of town centres, supporting start-up and growing small businesses, ensuring Staffordshire has a higher skilled and higher paid workforce, supporting development of sites so they're ready for business and strengthening transport corridors such as the A50/A500 and A38. A four-week consultation is set to take place soon after its approval.

39. Highways works to create the access from the A34 to the Pets at Home development began in February 2022 and will be overseen by the council. The 670,000 square foot development is expected to create 750 jobs when it opens in late 2022 and will be the company's new national headquarters.

40. We Are Staffordshire, the place marketing delivery vehicle for the council, unveiled the new Staffordshire Investment Prospectus in March 2022 at the international MIPIM property marketplace. The prospectus highlights economic investment opportunity across the whole of Staffordshire and has been jointly prepared by the Make It Investment service and Place Branding teams in collaboration with all district and borough councils. It presents key major projects that will regenerate and transform Staffordshire over the next five years, including Stafford town centre regeneration and Chatterley Valley West – part of the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone.

41. The Superfast Staffordshire programme will end in 2022. Its success, combined with the commercial roll-out, has enabled 96% of county premises to have available connectivity to superfast broadband (>30Mbs), however 4% currently miss out. [Project Gigabit](#) is a new £123M Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) investment into the region to enable premises that are not commercially viable to get 1,000Mbs connectivity. The council has been working with DCMS on an Open Market Review and Public review to ensure that this investment will deliver value for money and its progress, scheduled for deployment in 2023, will be shared on a new website in May this year.

42. In terms of climate change, over 100 applications were received for the second round of the Climate Change Action Fund which are currently being assessed. Furthermore, the council in partnership with environmental company Veolia launched the Staffordshire EnviroGrant programme in Quarter 4, which made grants of up to £750 available to not-for-profit organisations. Grants could be awarded to projects that

help improve waste and recycling, improve the natural environment, or raise awareness of environmental issues.

43. Positive progress is also being made on the actions in the council's Climate Change Action Plan 2. The council has been working with The Forest of Mercia Community Interest Company on two sites in Cannock Chase district where 17,500 trees will be planted. The planting has been funded by £92,000 of the Government's Trees for Climate Fund. A trial of the use of HVO fuels in the council's heavy goods and heavy plant vehicles has also commenced, which has the potential to save over 1,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> if it can be rolled out over the council's Highways and Household Waste and Recycling Centre operations. The council has also been successful in securing funding under the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and are looking at converting a new schools heating system from conventional gas fuelled boilers to a heat pump solution.

44. In March 2022, a two-week anti-idling campaign was delivered by the council and local businesses, to help raise awareness of improving air quality in Staffordshire. During the campaign, businesses encouraged employees to turn off their engines when they aren't in use.

45. Since the street lighting LED retrofit programme commenced in April 2021, 12,000 lanterns have been exchanged for energy efficient LED units up to the end of February 2022, reducing the associated energy consumption by almost 1.5m kWh per annum. This figure is ahead of planned delivery targets to convert around 47,000 lanterns by March 2025. When complete this programme will save the equivalent of 2,650 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e each year and reduce energy costs by c.£1.6M pa.

46. As part of the wider Medium Term Financial Strategy, it has been agreed that an extra £15.5m capital and minimum £1m revenue will be invested in the highway service during 2022/23. The money is in addition to £50m proposed investment in major projects, maintenance, and local improvements. The council also continues to transform its current Highways arrangements, with agreed changes to strengthen the council's control of highway management. This includes the transfer of the Asset Management, Risk and Liability team back into the council which is progressing well. Consultations have started with the staff involved and HR teams are working together to ensure a smooth transfer.

47. At the end of February, the UK faced 3 storms (Dudley, Eunice and Franklin) in the space of 7 days. All three affected Staffordshire, with Storm Franklin having the biggest impact. Staffordshire Highways Crews worked tirelessly over the week to respond to over 150 calls, including 82 fallen trees, as well as debris and localised flooding issues.

48. The financial position at Quarter 4 for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills is a forecast saving of £1.027m, compared to a saving of £1.228m in Quarter 3, with small forecast savings across the service. The forecast financial impact of COVID-19 for the directorate is £1.626m.

#### 49. Corporate Services

Delivery Performance Assessment	Finance Performance Assessment
<b>Green</b>	<b>Green</b>

Corporate Services is currently on track in terms of both Delivery and Finance in Quarter 4 and continues to provide vital support to the organisation in delivering on its priorities. Whilst the overall GREEN performance ratings reflect a great deal of activity that has taken place to progress its plans, like other service areas it continues to manage challenges regarding capacity impacting on progress.



50. In February both the council's new Strategic Plan, setting out the ambitions and priorities for the year ahead, and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) were approved at a meeting of Full Council. Work on developing the Corporate Delivery Plan for 2022/23 has now begun, which will include specific activities detailing how we will achieve the vision and priorities set.

51. Over a two-year period, the council aims to raise £17m through the sale of unused land and buildings to fund transformation of services and activity, in line with new Government regulation. To date the council has delivered c.£11.6m in year through the sale of 21 assets.

52. In addition, work on the council's property programme is progressing well, including the Lichfield Day Centre refurbishment which is due to be completed by the end of March. Service transition expected soon after in April 2022. Demolition work continues on Bilbrook House in South Staffordshire, with an expected completion of the end of April 2022. Furthermore, as part of the council's school's capital programme the expansion of Graham Balfour school has been completed and opened in January 2022, and both new primary schools in Uttoxeter and Fradley are on track to open in September 2022 as well as the school expansions at St Johns, Essington, and Princefields First, Penkridge.

53. In March the Judge's Chambers in County Buildings, Stafford became the new home of Stafford Registrar's Office where people will give notice of marriage, civil partnerships and to register births and deaths. This new venue will provide more spacious rooms for appointments and ceremonies. Last year the service hosted 4,000 weddings and registered

over 3,000 births and approximately 6,000 deaths across its various offices.

54. Digital inclusion remains a key priority and work is continuing to address those key barriers. More than 180 devices have now been donated as part of 'Donate IT' Digital Device Recycling Scheme and these are now being distributed to people who are at risk of digital exclusion in the county. Those that have benefitted from the scheme include South Staffordshire Jobs Club who have received three laptops to help people search and apply for jobs and Staffordshire Women's Aid who have received five devices to help victims of sexual and domestic abuse to access counselling and group sessions.

55. The 2022 Community Fund launched in April. It will focus on projects which develop health and wellbeing; support communities caring for and supporting each other and looking after the places where we live and encouraging community spirit, including supporting Jubilee celebrations. The fund will run and make payments throughout the financial year but will close to new applications on 31 October 2022.

56. Over the last quarter there has been significant progress around promoting the Staffordshire story and place brand. This has included developing its plan and priorities for 2022/23, as well as continued delivery of external promotional activity with partners. Specific activities include campaign materials to support the Inward Investment Campaign, including a new investment prospectus brochure, and the council's involvement in the Commonwealth Games. A virtual Ambassador event was held in January, focussing on a prosperous Staffordshire, attracting over 80 online attendees. Further promotional events are being planned, including a potential Staffordshire Day event to take place at the House of Commons on 26<sup>th</sup> April.

57. In February, a Local Government pensions benefit scheme, Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVC Wise) was launched to its members, with 68 applications received so far. This equates to an annual saving of £27,000, which is set to increase as more applications are received. Work also continues to deliver the council's internal People Strategy, including the development of a new careers' website which is expected to go live by late Summer. In addition, as we move towards 'living with COVID' work is taking place to support staff to work in a smart and flexible way.

58. Absence levels continue to rise and year on year we see absence levels worsen with long term absence at 8.23 days lost per employee (Feb 2022), compared to 7.30 at the same point last year. Short-term absence at 3.40 days lost per employee (Feb 2022) compared to 2.38 at the same point last year. Absences relating to diagnosed/suspected cases of COVID-19 account for 1.56 days lost per employee over this period an increase from last year at the same point at 1.1. However, it is worth

noting that pre COVID (Feb 2020) total absence levels were at 11.68 days lost per employee, therefore an underlying improvement from pre COVID. Outside of COVID related absence psychological disorders is the highest absence reason at 3.44 days lost, an increase of 19% from last year. However, 52% (2027) of employees have had no absence and 20% (777) have had less than 5 days absence.

59. In Corporate Services the financial position at Quarter 4 is a forecast saving of £0.652m, compared to a saving of £0.868m in Quarter 3. This is largely due to staffing vacancies and increased incomes. The forecast financial impact of COVID-19 for the directorate is £0.461m.

#### **60. Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications of note in relation to this report, which is for information and discussion, not for decision.

#### **61. Resource and Value for Money Implications**

Please see Finance Appendices.

#### **62. Climate Change Implications**

There are no direct climate change implications of note.

### **List of Appendices:**

- Appendix 1 - Performance Dashboard
  - Appendix 2 - Finance Quarter 4 Summary
  - Appendix 3 - Finance Quarter 4 Detailed Report
  - Appendix 4 - Corporate Checklist
  - Appendix 5 - Revenue Forecast Outturn 2021/22
  - Appendix 6 - Capital Forecast Outturn 2021/22
  - Appendix 7 - Financial Health Indicators 2021/22
- 

## Contact Details

**Assistant Director:** Kerry Dove, Assistant Director for Strategy & Transformation

Rob Salmon, County Treasurer

**Report Author:** Wendy Tompson

**Job Title:** Insight Manager

**Telephone No.:** 01785 854267

**E-Mail Address:** [wendy.tompson@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:wendy.tompson@staffordshire.gov.uk)

**Report Author:** Rachel Spain

**Job Title:** Corporate Finance Manager

**Telephone No.:** 01785 854455

**E-Mail Address:** [rachel.spain@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.spain@staffordshire.gov.uk)

