

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Corporate Review Committee – 13 January 2014

Staffordshire County Council – Draft Strategic Plan 2014 to 2018 “Leading together for a Connected Staffordshire - Our Vision for Staffordshire”

Recommendation

1. Members of the Corporate Review Committee are asked to consider and comment on the draft of the Strategic Plan 2014-2018, which is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. Members are requested to consider this draft in the context of the update report presented to Corporate Review Committee on 2nd December 2013. Members are particularly encouraged to:
 - Review, challenge and test the draft Strategic Plan to ensure that it sufficiently sets out the vision and direction of the county council and how these will benefit the people and communities of Staffordshire; and
 - Consider whether the draft Strategic Plan best reflects the current challenges faced by the county council over the four year plan period and beyond.

Report of the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Transformation

Background

2. The Strategic Plan sets out the vision and priorities of the county council. It is refreshed annually to ensure that it reflects changing local and national circumstances, and sets out how the authority will address them.
3. This report provides Corporate Review Committee with an update to the report presented to the committee on 2nd December 2013. It includes the draft version of the Staffordshire County Council Strategic Plan which was presented at Cabinet on the 18th December, alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). This is an opportunity for members of this Committee to influence the further development of the Strategic Plan.
4. The high level delivery of the Strategic Plan will be supported by the Staffordshire County Council Business Plan which will be presented to Corporate Review Committee in March 2014, a detailed timetable of the preparation process for the Strategic Plan and Business Plan is presented at Appendix 2.

Context

5. In July 2013 the Local Government Association published “Rewiring Public Services”, a report on the future of local government based on the opinion that today’s model of public services is unsustainable due to three main factors:

1. Demand and costs are going up but funding is going down.
2. Public services concentrate on trying to handle failure rather than on preventing it.
3. People perceive public services as remote, over bureaucratic and bogged down in process.

6. The report cites evidence that shows the public:

1. want public services to be based on notions of the public good, rather than just what's good for me;
2. understand the public good largely in terms of universalism, with equality of access to benefits;
3. are prepared, with prompting, to consider types of equality that relate to outcomes rather than access;
4. see more potential in playing a strong adult role in public service development locally rather than nationally; and
5. struggle to see a compelling or urgent case for reforming public services to cope with economic pressures and social changes, and divide evenly on whether to support service cuts or tax rises.

7. This creates a challenging policy context within which local government must show strong leadership and vision to meet these demands whilst at the same time transforming itself to meet the fiscal challenges of public sector funding reform.

Insight

8. Based on analysis taken from national opinion polls and market research, 2013 began with a high degree of uncertainty amongst the general public. There were fears of a triple-dip recession and concerns about the increasing cost of living against a back drop of fairly static wage levels.
9. By the end of 2013, despite growing optimism about the national economy according to a recent Ipsos MORI poll, only one in seven British adults feel the recent economic upturn has had at least a fair amount of impact on their standard of living.
10. Therefore the priority for the county council must be to prioritise economic prosperity for all, providing more opportunities for good quality jobs and support for those who need it most.
11. This must be achieved within the constraints of a tightened financial situation for all of the public sector and increased expectations amongst the general public, two of the key themes contained within the draft Strategic Plan.
12. Reflecting concerns about costs of living the public are still expecting their council to continue to provide access to services and support without raising council tax. In a recent opinion poll only 36% agreed with the statement "I would be happy to pay more council tax if it helped my local council maintain current levels of service" (Ipsos MORI, 2013).

13. However, within the same survey it was also reported that the public overwhelmingly say that they trust their local council rather than the government to make the important decisions about how services are provided in their local area (79% compared to 11%). (Ipsos MORI, 2013). This provides a clear mandate to the county council to act on behalf of its residents and promote their interests at local and national level, another theme reflected in the draft Strategic Plan.
14. A recent survey conducted on behalf of the Staffordshire Strategic Partnership of over 1,600 residents revealed that the majority of respondents were positive about their local area as a place to live, with a total of 92% fairly or very satisfied across the area (Staffordshire 94% and Stoke 85%). These levels were the same as in previous waves of this survey.
15. Other findings from the survey indicated that levels of satisfaction with the public sector were also high: Local Pharmacies (94%), the Fire & Rescue Service (90%) and GPs (89%) had the highest levels of satisfaction, whereas the County/City Council (66%), District or Borough Councils (62%) and other criminal justice agencies (57%) had lower levels of satisfaction.
16. It is positive that these results have remained high at the same time as significant changes have been made in the role of the public sector and the way services are delivered. This suggests that the transformation that has taken place has reflected the needs and wants of residents. This is confirmed by national research which suggests that nearly two thirds of people believe that, in recent years, Government and public services have tried to do too much, and people should take more responsibility for their own lives (Ipsos MORI, 2012).
17. Our vision for achieving the further transformation required to achieve our three priority outcomes for Staffordshire whilst maintaining our high levels of satisfaction is set out in the draft Strategic Plan. As a county council we will need to work hard to continue to engage with our residents about their priorities and involve more people in shaping our approach.
18. This work will be taken forward through a revised Community Engagement Strategy which will be prepared in the coming months and brought to this Committee for Scrutiny.

Process

19. The Strategic Plan is part of the County Council's policy framework, as set out in Section Five of the County Council's Constitution (referred to as the Corporate Strategy). As such, the County Council's scrutiny function must be involved in the development of the plan.
20. The draft Strategic Plan has been produced using a wide range of insight, and by taking account of our ongoing engagement activity with Staffordshire's people and communities.

21. It has also been influenced by the findings of the Local Government Association Peer Challenge which took place during September 2013. A copy of the LGA peer team's final feedback report is attached as Appendix 3 to this report.
22. The Committee's comments will be taken into account by the Cabinet when they develop the final version of the Strategic Plan during February 2014, which will then be presented to Full Council for final approval.

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Appendices/Background papers

Appendix 1 – “Leading for a Connected Staffordshire – Our Vision for Staffordshire” Draft Strategic Plan 2014-2018

Appendix 2 – Preparation Timetable – Staffordshire County Council Strategic Plan and Business Plan

Appendix 3 – Final Feedback report from LGA Peer Review of Staffordshire County Council (16th – 20th September 2013)

Appendix 1

Leading for a Connected Staffordshire

Staffordshire County Council

Our Vision for Staffordshire

2014 to 2018

FOREWORD

Welcome to Staffordshire County Council's strategic plan for 2014 to 2018.

Staffordshire is a great place to live, work and invest where most people enjoy a good quality of life. A county with a proud heritage and bright hopes for the future – well positioned at the heart of the West Midlands to create jobs, growth and prosperity for local people and to make a mark on the world stage.

Working in partnership, much has been achieved over the last four years – a better quality of life for local people, major programmes delivered to secure future growth and jobs and substantial changes to how we operate, ensuring we can continue to deliver better outcomes and respond to the financial pressures we face.

Our current strategic plan was developed some three years ago, and much has changed during that time. Therefore, we have reviewed our strategy – building on the strong foundations of the last four years and setting out a clear vision for the future of Staffordshire and the role of the County Council in delivering that vision.

This vision matches our detailed understanding of what matter to residents and a belief that we can all work better together to improve lives in a more affordable way.

Whilst we know there will be challenges ahead and tough decisions to be made, there are also many exciting opportunities. Working with partners, communities, families and individuals, we can deliver a better Staffordshire for current and future generations.

Philip Atkins, Leader, Staffordshire County Council

INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years there has been a major change in the way people live their lives. Technology has transformed how people work, play and connect, employment patterns have fundamentally changed, family structures are more varied and complex and we have more choices about how we spend our time and money. We live in a global economy with more connections than ever before to friends, family, employers and information.

Today, we all want greater choice and control of our own lives. People's expectations have changed and we are no longer happy to receive what the state deems is best. This has profound implications for all public services. Whilst this means that we have to change, we must also maintain our role of protecting the vulnerable in our communities and helping those who need it most. Getting the balance right means looking carefully at how we use our resources to make sure we can target our support where it is most needed.

The worst global recession since the 1930s has resulted in a prolonged period of austerity that will continue for many years to come. Whilst the economy is recovering, the message is clear - doing more with less is the new normal. This has led to significant questions about what the state can afford to do in the future, particularly as demand continues to grow and needs become more complex.

Staffordshire County Council's response to this new environment is clear. We need to provide strong leadership alongside our partners to transform what we do and focus on what matters most to local people.

We can rightly be proud of our achievements over the last four years. Working together as One Staffordshire we have created new jobs and better opportunities for our workforce. We have improved standards of education and training, and continued to reduce levels of crime and disorder.

At the same time, we've made major changes to the council and the way we operate. We have transformed ourselves into an organisation focused on achieving positive outcomes for 'people' and 'place', a much stronger focus on what matters to local people, and a

transformation in the way that we commission and secure better outcomes for local people. Over the last five years, we have successfully made £130m of savings and frozen council tax, whilst continuing to invest in our economy and achieve better value for money for the taxpayer.

Whilst we should celebrate our successes and achievements, we also know there is much more to do.

OUR NEW STRATEGY - 2014 to 2018

With our track record of delivery we should be confident about our ability to deliver in the future. Whilst the economic situation remains tough, we are now in a period of sustained, if slow recovery. However, the financial pressures facing local government - and all parts of the public sector - will continue for many years to come. But, most importantly, the needs and wants of communities, families and individuals continue to change.

We have listened to what local people tell us. We are not always the best placed to be the provider of what local people or businesses need - nor do we have a monopoly on good ideas or solutions for the issues faced by our communities. This is why we are redoubling our efforts to work with residents, voluntary groups, partners and the private sector to find new and different ways to improve lives through building stronger communities. Our approach is about providing the connections and creating the right conditions for Staffordshire's people to flourish and prosper, without state interference.

We firmly believe this is both the right thing to do and what local people want us to do. However, we also know that the current approach to services and delivery is not affordable; nor is it delivering the outcomes that people often want and need.

In short, the status quo is not an option.

Vision, Values, Behaviours and Outcomes

Whilst we need to fundamentally review what we do, our role as community leader is enduring and will be significantly strengthened in the future. As a democratically accountable organisation we need to provide strong leadership to all partners from across the public, private and voluntary sector and work effectively with local communities to deliver a better quality of life for all.

Collectively, we and our partners, including national government, spend over £7.5bn of public money in Staffordshire. We all have a duty to make sure this money is spent as wisely and effectively as possible. Whilst significant savings need to be made, there is still considerable capacity and resources that can make a difference to people's lives.

In August 2013, the County Council agreed a new vision and three priority outcomes providing a simple and clear articulation of what we will focus on over the next four years:

Vision : A connected Staffordshire, where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy.

Our three priority outcomes. The people of Staffordshire will:

- Be able to access more good jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth
- Be healthier and more independent
- Feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community.

Delivering the vision will require strong leadership from elected members, hard work from all staff, stronger partnership working and a new relationship with individuals, families and their communities. The council has agreed a set of values and behaviours that will guide how we will think and work together on a day-to-day basis to help deliver the vision.

Values	Behaviours
Put the people of Staffordshire first	Articulate : communicate compellingly
Value each other	Ambitious : Seeking out improvement and innovation
Embrace doing things differently	Perceptive : Understanding the wider perspective
Do the right things	Strategic : Driving for performance and results
	Leadership : Leading self and others
	Integrity : Insightful thinking

To deliver the vision, we need to continue to fundamentally review everything we do, how we do it and develop new and different ways of achieving outcomes with less resources. We need to retain what has worked well over the last four years, but challenge ourselves hard to develop new ways of working and delivering to respond to the challenges and opportunities ahead of us.

Our new approach is captured in a series of operating principles that will guide our thinking and choices over the next four years. A new philosophy that will redefine the role of the County Council and how we are organised to deliver:

Operating Principles

Evolve our relationship with residents

- Think individual, families and communities first, state last, promoting personal responsibility, resilience and independence in all our actions.
- Give a stronger voice and more clout to the people of Staffordshire on the issues that matter to them, not just those issues we have a statutory responsibility to deliver.
- Encourage and support all Elected Members to be true community leaders, informing and influencing at a local and county level to create great places to live.
- Collaborate with residents and communities to identify the best long-term solutions to problems, whether that's from within the community itself or from the voluntary, private or public sector.

One Staffordshire:

- Focus on leading and influencing for the good of Staffordshire - it doesn't matter who does what as long as it gets done.
- Integrate insight, creative thinking and planning with partners inside and outside Staffordshire as appropriate.
- Integrate back office, delivery and governance with partners inside and outside Staffordshire as appropriate.

Staffordshire County Council will:

- Promote Staffordshire as the place to invest, live, learn and visit.
- Be the passionate advocate for Staffordshire locally, nationally and internationally, seeking to deal with only the things that matter to our residents.

How we work:

- Get more joined up, locally and corporately, so we can work with residents, communities and partners to meet local needs more effectively.
- Get our financial systems, governance processes and commissioning support aligned to enable delivery of our ambitions.
- Everyone associated with the council (employees, Members, providers etc.) will go out of their way to understand what local people need, put their needs at the centre of what we do and find new and better ways to improve their lives.

The principles will be applied to everything we do, providing a framework to challenge, test and fundamentally review. There will be tough decisions to be made over the next four years and we will be open and transparent about the basis of our choices and actions. At the core of this is a commitment to have an open and honest dialogue with the residents of Staffordshire, listen to what you tell us and make decisions in full consultation and engagement with you and other stakeholders.

To achieve this, elected members will lead the delivery of this strategy, shaping the debate and discussions with local people and presenting the case for the decisions we need to make in the future.

LEADING FOR BETTER OUTCOMES

We understand that we need to rethink our relationship with communities, families and individuals. We need to make sure we acutely understand what people want and need and be guided by them about how we work together to develop shared solutions to long-standing issues. We need to find new ways of unlocking the capacity that sits within our communities and families to help deliver a better and more sustainable future, and we need to do this within the context of being part of a global society.

We need to do the right thing by stepping away when we are not needed and thinking innovatively about how to fill gaps to avoid creating dependency or detracting from existing community capacity.

Whilst this is the County Council's vision and strategic plan, it can only be achieved by working with others from the public, private and voluntary sector, not just within Staffordshire but across regional and national boundaries as well.

Securing economic growth, driving up educational attainment and skills, tackling health inequalities and reducing crime are difficult issues that defy 'quick fixes' and are beyond the control of a single agency. Only by working together will we deliver a better quality of life for the people of Staffordshire and respond to the financial pressures facing all partners.

We start from a good position; partnership working in Staffordshire is strong and improving all the time. The improvements around jobs, health, education and crime have only happened because of the continued commitment and hard work of all partners. Our challenge now is to build on the excellent foundations of recent years and redouble our efforts.

Supporting the continued development of the Local Enterprise Partnership, Education Trust, Health and Well Being Board and Police and Crime Commissioner will be important.

All partners need to challenge what we do to make sure we have strong and ambitious strategies supported by sound delivery plans.

All partners are united about what we need to do to deliver a better quality of life for local people:

- Create economic growth and jobs that benefit local businesses and people
- Improve health and well being and support people to become more independent
- Reduce crime, the fear of crime and make people feel safer in their communities.

Firm plans are in place and being delivered by all partners to achieve these shared outcomes but we need to review and strengthen our approach to make sure we can continue to deliver in the future. Success will only come through working with partners, residents, businesses and others to share our thinking and resources and develop new and different solutions to the challenges and opportunities facing Staffordshire. These are not just challenges for our county but are global issues requiring new ways of working and different solutions. Staffordshire will be at the forefront of this thinking.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Whilst this strategic plan rightly focuses on what will we do over the next four years, we need to think about the long-term future of Staffordshire. Modern life continues to change and this will only accelerate in the future. Whilst no-one can predict with complete certainty what life will be like in the future, we have a duty with our partners to shape this as best we can for future generations. Delivering this strategy will lay the foundations for a bright future for Staffordshire and its residents. We want people to be happy, prosperous, independent, safe and connected.

In short, our long-term vision for the future is that by 2033, Staffordshire:

- Is a place where individuals and families take responsibility for their own lives, happiness and futures
- Is a place where families inspire and support each other to fulfil their potential

- Is a place where communities support each other and have responsibility for making decisions
- Is a place where there is a clear understanding that the state is only there to provide support as a last line of defence
- Has a world-class, dynamic economy with a highly skilled workforce
- Is the 'go to' location for business, both nationally and internationally
- Has a reputation as an area for innovation, ambition and forward thinking
- Is a great place to live, seen as number one in the UK.

Whilst there will be challenges along the way, particularly as we move away from traditional building-based delivery, we should be bold and ambitious about the future of our county and work together to deliver an even better place to live for current and future generations.

CONCLUSIONS

Staffordshire is already a great place to live, work and invest and there is much that we should rightly be proud of. But we should be ambitious for our county and bring more investment and more good jobs for local people. This is how we will deliver a better quality of life for all.

We can only do this by working with other partners and local people. This strategy sets out a clear vision for the kind of Staffordshire we want to see in the future and what we will do as the County Council to deliver that vision.

Appendix 2 – Preparation Timetables – Strategic Plan and Business Plan

Strategic Plan

Task/Process	Date
Corporate Review Committee update	2nd December 2013
First Draft of Strategic Plan to Cabinet	18th December 2013
Draft Strategic Plan considered by Corporate Review Committee	13th January 2014
Cabinet – Recommendation to approve Strategic Plan for approval by Full Council	5th February 2014
Full Council to approve Strategic Plan alongside MTFS and 2014/15 Budget and Council Tax	13th February 2014

Business Plan

Task/Process	Date
Informal Cabinet	February 2014
Corporate Review Committee update	11 th March 2014
Business Plan launched	1 st April 2014



Corporate Peer Challenge

Staffordshire County Council

September 2013

Report

Background and scope of the peer challenge

On behalf of the team, I would like to say how much we enjoyed spending time in Staffordshire to work with you on the recent corporate peer challenge. The team very much appreciated the welcome we received and honesty with which people engaged in the process and the support provided in the lead up to, and during the course of, the challenge.

It is testimony to the council's desire for constructive external insight that Staffordshire commissioned the peer challenge. Peer challenges are managed and delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The peers who delivered the peer challenge were:

- Becky Shaw, Chief Executive, East Sussex County Council
- Councillor Mike Jones, Leader, Cheshire West & Chester Council
- Paula Hewitt, Director/Lead Commissioner for Economic & Community Infrastructure, Somerset County Council
- Stuart Timmiss, Head of Planning & Assets, Durham County Council
- Colin Maclean, Director, Community Links Bromley
- Wendy Balmain, Deputy Regional Director (Social Care & Partnerships), Department of Health
- Neil Shaw, Programme Manager, Local Government Association

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement-orientated and tailored to meet individual council's needs. The peers used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the evidence presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read. The guiding questions for all corporate peer challenges are:

- ❖ Does the council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- ❖ Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- ❖ Does the council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- ❖ Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change and transformation?
- ❖ Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

In addition, the council identified three significant issues for the team to explore:

- ❖ The approach to strategic commissioning
- ❖ Working in partnership
- ❖ Engaging with communities

Executive summary

Staffordshire County Council is seeking to shift its ethos and approach towards becoming a council which is 'achieving excellence in commissioning'. This is not to see commissioning as a process or end result, but as a vehicle through which it can achieve better outcomes for Staffordshire residents maximising all available public sector spend in the county.

The council has dedicated considerable energy over the last twelve months to evolve its existing operating model. This has included putting in place some fundamental building blocks and working to communicate what the new approach means to members, staff and partner agencies.

This is bold work and an exciting time for the authority. The peer challenge was timed to enable the council to take stock of its work to date and examine how it was shaping further plans to put the new vision and ways of working fully into place.

There are a number of examples of joint delivery on which the council can build further in health and social care integration, i54 and in establishing Entrust in 2013. There are good opportunities to use the experiences, learning and thinking so far to now 'earth' the ambition and turn it into robust implementation. 'Earthing' will include the need to develop a better and more consistent understanding throughout the council of what commissioning means, the priorities for change, the key levers and linkages in those areas and the implications of this for future service delivery. It will also mean the council will need to concentrate on ensuring that partner agencies are included in every stage of the commissioning framework, particularly early on in discussions about what outcomes the partners can make a real impact on improving.

There is a need to tie in the commissioning framework more closely to the three new priority outcomes identified by the council. There is a clear aspiration for services to be co-designed and co-produced with service users and Staffordshire residents. This is still at an early stage overall. There are also greater opportunities for providers to work creatively to offer and deliver solutions.

Over the coming months it will be important to concentrate on the operational delivery of this radical approach. Senior members, officers and partner representatives need to work together consistently to visibly lead this work, drive its delivery and ensure it is understood. In doing so, the council can be confident about others' belief in the council's capabilities and motivations and has a great opportunity to consider how to best to harness other contributions.

The council has achieved much in a relatively short time and is considered by many partners as the organisation to provide the leadership for public sector change and has a strong platform for development. The peer challenge has identified some opportunities to build on this to ensure not only that the implementation of this new way of working is robust, draws on the benefits of involving partner agencies and is in touch with the views of residents, but – more crucially – it begins to deliver better outcomes for the people of Staffordshire in the priority areas.

Detailed findings in the focus areas

The approach to strategic commissioning

The council is embarking on a challenging and ambitious agenda to be an organisation which is 'achieving excellence in commissioning'. Over the past few months, the council has dedicated considerable energy to developing the philosophy and framework for the future direction of the council and remodelling the way the council will work in the future. This is based on securing the best outcomes for the residents of Staffordshire using a commissioning model, which is being clearly led by senior members and officers.

The new model is well understood by strategic leaders within the council and across partner agencies. The approach is focused on a clear set of three outcomes. There is a strong sense of ownership and enthusiasm for change and challenge amongst staff, who are keen to improve outcomes for residents. Awareness of the commissioning concept is also high with staff.

The council has been driving the implementation of the commissioning concept over the last twelve months by reorganising its workforce, creating Commissioner roles and investing in considerable organisational development work centred around a new vision, values and behaviours framework.

There are a number of examples of joint delivery on which the council can build further, for examples, health and social care integration, i54 and Entrust. There are some examples of joint commissioning such as work around inward investment delivery, voluntary and community sector infrastructure and substance misuse.

The council has made a notable investment in its customer insight function to support the new operating model. This brings together considerable information and intelligence and is beginning to be used more consistently by the council to inform service commissioning and decision-making. The council is learning from other local authorities to inform and shape their own approach to the new model. There is a need to ensure the customer insight is recognisable in localities and on the front line.

There are good opportunities to further progress the implementation at an appropriate pace. There is a need to develop a better and more consistent understanding throughout the council of what 'commissioning' means and the implications of this for future service delivery. On occasions, the language used and the supporting structures of the new operating model can be contradictory or simply confusing for members and officers. The use of plain language and consistent clear messages will help to boost staff, members and partners' understanding. Single points of contact for providers/suppliers may well provide a clearer way for providers to engage and communicate with the council.

In the next phase of the move to achieving excellence, the council should provide the leadership expected and wanted by partners and will need to concentrate on ensuring that partner agencies are included in every stage of the commissioning framework, particularly early on in discussion about "the right question" and what outcomes the process is looking to specifically improve.

It is early days in evolving the operating model. As a result it is as yet unclear how the new commissioning approach will drive up improved outcomes in the council's priority areas. There is a need to more closely tie the commissioning framework to the three priority outcomes identified by the council, to recognise both the key levers and linkages and to clearly direct resources at those priorities. The council needs to monitor how outcomes are being improved and reassure itself that the commissioned delivery model for a particular service(s) is delivering, using the performance outcomes framework it is currently developing. Bringing all these aspects together will be a crucial building block for managing capacity effectively.

There are examples where more focus is being placed on developing preventative activities, for example through substance misuse and frail elderly work, but commissioning of early intervention needs to gather pace and draw on the examples already in place. This will enable the council to make a much bigger contribution to reducing the long-term demand for some services.

There is a clear aspiration for services to be co-designed and co-produced with service users and Staffordshire residents. This is an excellent aspiration. This co-design and co-production of service is still at an early stage overall. There are long standing examples of co-design of some specific services, for example in the health area, but genuine co-production will mean service users and other stakeholders need to be consistently engaged early in the commissioning process and their views reflected in the specifications for commissioning.

The council is changing the way it seeks to engage with providers/suppliers in the market for some services. Building effective relationships with the market is an on-going and challenging process to deliver more innovation. There are greater opportunities for providers to work creatively to deliver solutions. Although this is happening in some areas, there are opportunities to extend this approach, for example, through the Health & Well Being Board. The council's market position statement for health and social care is an important step towards improved engagement of the provider market. The council may benefit from talking to others who have been using this such as East Sussex and the 'Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care' programme authorities to develop a better understanding of the market for services.

The council has recognised the role the community and voluntary sector can play in achieving outcomes and have recently let a contract to VAST to develop the sector. However, on-going active engagement by the council will be required to help them fulfil their potential.

Working in partnership

The council has worked with partner agencies to develop a common set of joint priorities. This is challenging work and the shared ambition is a testimony to the spirit of partnership working, good relationships and goodwill in Staffordshire developed in recent years. This has included strengthening the partnership with Stoke on Trent – through the joint City Deal bid and work around the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The Health & Well Being Board and LEP have clear strategies in place with an agreed set of priorities that seek to tackle big ticket areas. Governance on the Health & Well Being Board has improved with joint chairs, although further work may be required in ensuring all partners, including districts, take a full role in going forward.

Feedback from partner agencies, the voluntary sector and district and parish councils has been generally very positive about their relationship with the County Council and a good level of trust exists between the public agencies in the county.

The council has worked particularly effectively with a number of district councils within the county. This includes agreeing four 'district deals' with district councils and recognising that one size does not fit all is an important approach. The peer team recognises the political and organisational reality of the relationships with eight very different districts and believes that building on 'coalitions of the willing' the County Council and districts will be able to build towards common priorities and pull in the same direction, which is likely to lead to a stronger improvement in outcomes for residents. Senior political leaders and officers from across the county should continue to work hard to make this a reality.

There are a number of examples of partnership working at the strategic level of which the partner agencies should be proud. This includes; City Deal, i54, Stoke and Staffordshire NHS Trust and Healthy Tamworth. The creation of Entrust – a joint venture between the County Council and Capita for education support services – is a good example of the council taking a mature approach to engaging with a strategic partner. This enables it to access more funding, capacity and expertise, whilst retaining a stake in the new organisation.

For many partners, the County Council is the natural leader. However, to enhance partnership working, adopting a more collaborative leadership model is likely to deliver better outcomes for Staffordshire. The peer team received a range of feedback on the Staffordshire Partnership. It is therefore difficult to make an objective judgement on its effectiveness. The Partnership therefore needs to reassure itself that its current structure and operation is fit for purpose to deliver the ambition.

The Health & Well Being Board has started to think how it will translate strategy into delivery and has a phased programme with clearly identified priorities. The particular issues presented by system failure in the NHS acute sector and the outcome of the Trust Special Administrator are challenging, but also present an immediate opportunity to jointly design and agree a way forward for health and social care in Staffordshire. Further work to develop Board level relationships, recognising that some organisations are still relatively new, supported by a clear investment and delivery plan for the whole system should be considered and would help support this delivery.

Engaging with communities

A considerable number of engagement and consultation mechanisms exist to enable residents views and voice to be heard, including; district people's panels, the rural community council, CCG patient involvement panels, village agents, VAST, the County Council's residents tracker, initiatives like 'Feeling the Difference', Engaging Communities Staffordshire, business engagement events and numerous service specific consultations being undertaken by the public agencies in the county.

Political leadership is seen by the voluntary sector to be supportive of community engagement. The commissioning of the voluntary and community sector infrastructure service included a pooled budget arrangement between the council and Newcastle-under-Lyme district council. VAST is commissioned by the council to improve the contract readiness of individual voluntary organisations. This is helping prepare existing local organisations and the market to engage in future delivery.

A wide range of data, including feedback from local elected members and consultations, has created a strong council customer insight capability, to enable a better understanding of residents' and communities views. There is evidence that service users views are sought to inform commissioning plans and to provide differentiated services across the county, for example in the current substance misuse commissioning process. There is a need to ensure the customer insight is recognisable in localities and on the front line.

There are a variety of options for ensuring community engagement is more robust, consistent and linked more strongly into commissioning local priorities. A new locality arrangement which brings together local members, district commissioning leads, community partnership staff, district public health commissioners and local agencies may be one way of ensuring the voice of communities becomes more embedded in the commissioning approach for local priorities as well as assisting with participatory and or community budgeting concepts. Approaches like the one taken in Durham to its Area Action Partnerships may provide useful learning and reflection for the council.

As a high proportion of the council's own staff are Staffordshire residents, there is an opportunity for the council to leverage the use of its own staff as advocates. Many parts of the country are considering the community budgeting approach. As the partner agencies embrace joint commissioning more consistently this is something partners may wish to explore.

Leadership and governance

The council's ambition to commission and achieve excellence is bold and is understood by senior members and officers. Feedback from partner agencies strongly indicates that they welcome the approach and sense of purpose to deliver better outcomes for Staffordshire over the last four years with the council adopting a collaborative leadership model with partners. There is a strong sense of pride in Staffordshire and this is a significant asset on which the council can build. Overall relationships between members and officers are good, with mutual respect towards each other.

The council has worked to widen the leadership of the 'commissioning council' by working with its top 150 managers to better understand commissioning and the role middle managers play in 'making it happen'. Work has been undertaken to develop the organisation's leadership capacity through the Performance Culture Programme.

The biggest single leadership challenge in the next couple of years will be to translate the concept of commissioning into stronger implementation for improved outcomes in the priority areas. Senior members, officers and partner representatives need to work together consistently to visibly lead this work and drive its delivery. The organisation is likely to need to invest in developing its leadership capacity in this different world. The council recognises this through the use of its Performance Culture Programme, its wider organisational development work and seeking to draw on its top managers. The concept of achieving excellence in commissioning needs to be explained to local people and agencies.

Getting and maintaining the support of middle managers will be fundamental to such a large-scale shift in the council's approach. Early work has been undertaken to involve middle managers and offer support to develop their leadership skills and understanding of commissioning. The use of a senior manager network/forum may be one way of engaging middle managers in the implementation of the work as it rolls out, thereby spreading ownership. Using the performance framework to shape and evaluate middle managers performance is also likely to help.

There is potential to tap the resource non-Executive members provide in addition to their local community leadership activities, through a new role for the council's scrutiny function. This would need to be carefully thought through and the council might want to consider engaging the Centre for Public Scrutiny to help develop the concept and use it as an opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the commissioning function. This should be focused on enabling members to be involved early on in a positive, constructive, approach for scrutiny to examine commissioning proposals and throughout the on-going delivery to monitor and evaluate the delivery of outcomes. This may assist in strengthening democratic engagement and accountability of commissioned services.

Financial viability and organisational capacity

At the time of the peer challenge in September 2013, the council had a clear Medium Term Financial Strategy and was in a sound financial position, particularly compared to many other local authorities. It was acknowledged that, similar to all other local authorities and the public sector overall, that there is significant financial uncertainty ahead but the council's focus on a radical new approach appears to position it to respond well.

The council has made a financial savings of £133m over the past four years. The council has mapped the public sector spend in Staffordshire (of around £7.5bn), which provides a good platform to inform commissioning activity.

Council property and assets are being used effectively. The council has made an investment in areas like the Transformation Unit and organisational development function to boost its capacity to manage the transition to being a different kind of council. It has also invested in developing its intellectual capacity to develop the commissioning concept for

Staffordshire including a series of 'think pieces' and associated work. The council has a set of organisational development interventions which lend themselves to supporting the transition. The council has also boosted its capacity in key areas like procurement specialisms by bringing in Capita on a flexible basis.

Looking to the future, if the partner agencies are to collectively make a significant impact on improving outcomes and manage demand for services through influencing the public sector spend in the county, they will need to be able to recognise the interdependencies in order to more greatly influence the public sector spend in the county and work together to do things differently. This will require mature discussion and recognition that organisations are at different points in their thinking about resources and with differing levels of maturity and capacity to move more quickly. There needs to be collective leadership to determine how resources should be used.

It will be important to monitor the organisation's capacity on an on-going basis as the commissioning work rolls out further. The overall changes the council is working on will require a different organisational culture. The characteristics of the desired culture are captured in the vision, values and behaviour framework and the main challenge will be ensuring this is translated through to how staff behave, performance is judged, talent is managed and new staff are recruited. The initial signs on this are positive.

Effective procurement is a key foundation for the new operating model and attention needs to be paid to ensure the way it is undertaken in all cases supports the mission. When it is consistently done well, there will be the potential to create a single procurement function for Staffordshire. Parochial interests within partner agencies and some district councils are currently a barrier to this development. Senior officers can play a key role in tackling these issues to create better use of procurement knowledge, expertise and consistency, if the partners determine there is a sound basis for this consolidation in helping them deliver better outcomes for residents.

Finally, we would like to thank colleagues and members at Staffordshire, especially Jon Vining, Kieran Smith and their colleagues for their support in the lead up to the peer challenge and during the challenge itself. The council embraced the challenge positively and supported the process very well.

We have offered further discussions and a follow up visit from members of the peer team if that would be helpful. This would be aimed at building on the outcomes from the peer challenge and enabling the council to reflect on the outcomes from the challenge. The council is still in the process of determining the need or focus of the follow up visit and we will explore this over the coming months.

How the peer challenge aims to add value

The LGA is keen to understand how peer challenge can add real benefits for the council. We will evaluate the peer challenge, but we are also keen to track the benefits the council have derived from the work. The benefits will be explored sometime after the peer challenge. However, the peer team have identified the following likely significant benefits from this peer challenge:

- **The drive to further accelerate progress on priority areas, especially on growing the economy** – the peer challenge has identified the need for a more consistent joined up approach across the council and the need for better support from managers to accelerate delivery. This will also include a more rapid move to priority led budgeting, consideration of other service delivery models for some services and taking actions on existing assets.
- **Sustain the positive pressure on the planning function to further improve** – maintain the direction of improvement for planning to ensure this now delivers improved performance. Although the council is undertaking work in this area, the peer challenge should trigger a refocusing of effort in this area, including the wider planning performance, such as legal services.
- **Changing approach to service users** – making progress on a more joined up approach to customer information from across the organisation and beginning to move more customer enquiries and transactions to online delivery.