



CAPITAL STRATEGY

2024/25

1. Introduction & Background

- 1.1. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities requires local authorities to produce a 'Capital Strategy'. The purpose of the Capital Strategy is to demonstrate that the Council's capital expenditure and investment decisions are taken in line with corporate priorities and properly take account of Stewardship, Value for money, Prudence, Sustainability, and Affordability
- 1.2. The Capital Strategy is intended to give a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future sustainability. It allows authorities to give greater weight to local circumstances and explain their approach to borrowing and investment.
- 1.3. The Capital Strategy forms part of the Council's integrated revenue, capital financial planning and sets out the long-term context in which capital expenditure and investment decisions are made. It is an integral component of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and is aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan, Asset Management Strategy, and Treasury Management Strategy.
- 1.4. The strategy will provide for a balanced, sustainable capital programme over the medium term planning period ensuring that limited resources are applied in the most effective, efficient and economical way to contribute to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan.
- 1.5. The strategy sets out how the Council will prioritise its capital spending plans within the resources available and indicates the action to be taken to maximise resources for capital spending. The strategy is strategic in nature and will focus upon the process for determining capital investment priorities.
- 1.6. The strategy sets out the strategic approach to the management of debt and borrowing. The detailed implications of this are contained within the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) which is updated annually.
- 1.7. The Capital Strategy will be updated annually alongside the Council's MTFP. There will also be a fundamental review of the strategy alongside a revision of the Corporate Plan.

2. Corporate Priorities

- 2.1. The Capital Strategy is driven by local priorities. The Council's spending strategy is set out in the Corporate Plan formally adopted by the Council. Following the elections in May 2023, there was a fundamental review of the Corporate Plan focussing on the period 2023-2027 (up to the end of the current political administration). The Corporate Plan was agreed by Council on 18th October 2023.

- 2.2. The Council's 4-year Corporate Plan (2023-2027)¹ establishes the Council's vision, corporate objectives and key priorities for the medium term. It establishes the Council's commitment in the delivery of service and community leadership to the residents and businesses of the Staffordshire Moorlands. The Council's vision is expressed as "*Achieving Excellence in the delivery of high quality services that meet the needs and aspirations of our communities*" This vision is articulated further by four aims within which are specific objectives which inform the activities of the Council in the delivery of services and community leadership. The plan further details priority outcomes and priority actions:

Aim 1: Help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live & work

Aim 2: Use resources effectively and provide value for money

Aim 3: Help create a strong economy by supporting further regeneration of towns and villages

Aim 4: Protect and improve the environment

3. Capital Spending Priorities

- 3.1. The Council's capital investment priorities are determined by the corporate priorities set out above. The key capital investment priorities for the Council are therefore as follows:

Corporate Property – the Council will invest in maintaining the properties that support the delivery of services direct to residents.

Other Corporate Assets – the Council will invest in other assets that support the delivery of services e.g. transport fleet.

Affordable Housing & Private Sector Housing Renewal – the Council will support the development of affordable housing and investment in the improvement in housing conditions throughout the district.

Enabling Growth – the Council will support the growth of business and employment opportunities within the district in addition to housing development in line with the commitments set out in the Local Plan

Service Transformation – the Council will invest in projects that improve service performance or reduce service expenditure on an "invest to save" basis the will include investment in ICT

4. Asset Management Planning

- 4.1. The overriding objective of asset management is to ensure that the Council maintains a portfolio of property assets that is appropriate, fit for purpose and affordable.

- 4.2. The Council's property portfolio consists of:

¹ <https://www.staffs Moorlands.gov.uk/article/7754/Corporate-plan-and-strategies>

- **Operational property** i.e. assets that support core business and service delivery
- **Investment properties** held to support economic growth and/ or to provide a financial return to the Council e.g. industrial units
- **Community assets** e.g. parks, playgrounds and open spaces.

4.3. Asset management is an important part of the council's management arrangements and is crucial to the delivery of value for money services. The Council through production of its Asset Management Plan (AMP) is committed to:

- Optimise the Council's land and property portfolio through proactive estate management and effective corporate arrangements for the acquisition and disposal;
- A regular review of the condition of retained properties including a long-term (30-year) assessment of the necessary investment to maintain the assets fit for purpose; and
- Realise the value of any properties that have been declared surplus to requirements in a timely manner, having regard to the market conditions.

5. **Service delivery & commercial activities and investments**

5.1. The revised Treasury Management Code 2021 requires all investments and investment income to be attributed to one of the following three purposes:

Treasury management Arising from the organisation's cash flows or treasury risk management activity, this type of investment represents balances which are only held until the cash is required for use. Treasury investments may also arise from other treasury risk management activity which seeks to prudently manage the risks, costs or income relating to existing or forecast debt or treasury investments.

Service delivery Investments held primarily and directly for the delivery of public services including housing, regeneration and local infrastructure. Returns on this category of investment which are funded by borrowing are permitted only in cases where the income is "either related to the financial viability of the project in question or otherwise incidental to the primary purpose".

Commercial return Investments held primarily for financial return with no treasury management or direct service provision purpose. Risks on such investments should be proportionate to an authority's financial capacity – i.e., that 'plausible losses' could be absorbed in budgets or reserves without unmanageable detriment to local services. An authority must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return.

5.2. Treasury management investments are considered in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, whereas Service delivery and Commercial return are considered to be Non-Treasury investments and, as such, are considered here in the Capital Strategy.

- 5.3. Service delivery investments could include projects contributing to the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan ambitions for example on housing and regeneration; or investments in a company in which the Council has a stake and is established for the delivery of Council services.
- 5.4. Commercial investments may include investments explicitly taken with the aim of making a financial surplus for the Council, or be fixed assets which are held primarily for financial benefit or to support economic growth. Reasons for commercial investments are: financial returns to fund services to residents, reductions in service spending; pursuing the Council's Growth Strategy; or economic development and regeneration activity in the district.
- 5.5. The Council will consider options to invest prudently on a commercial basis and to take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves, supported by our robust governance process.
- 5.6. Such investments do not always give priority to security and liquidity over yield. In these cases, such a decision will be explicit, with the additional risks set out and the impact on financial sustainability identified and reported. Before considering any such investments the Council will ensure that it has the appropriate legal powers to undertake such investments, that there is no wider detrimental impact to the Council in progressing a commercial investment (e.g. around overall borrowing powers), and that any investment is proportionate of all investments in order to avoid an excessive level of risk.
- 5.7. The commercial investments may involve the acquisition of property. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) define investment property as property held solely to earn rentals or for capital appreciation or both. Historically, property has provided strong investment returns in terms of stable income. Property investment is not without risk as property values can fall as well as rise and changing economic conditions could cause tenants to leave with properties remaining vacant. These risks will continue to be identified and managed through the Council's Risk Management Framework.

6. Loans to Third Parties

- 6.1. The council has discretion to grant loans to third parties for a number of reasons. These loans are treated as capital expenditure. In making loans the Council is exposing itself to the risk that the borrower defaults on repayments. The Council, in making these loans, will therefore ensure they are prudent and that the risks have been identified and fully considered.
- 6.2. The Council will periodically review its loan portfolio in order to ensure that the cumulative exposure of the Council is proportionate and prudent.
- 6.3. The Council will ensure that a full due diligence exercise is undertaken for each individual loan and will ensure that adequate security is in place. The business case for each loan will consider all of the benefits and the risks.
- 6.4. It will be necessary to assess the level of risk attached to the provision of each individual loan and consequently build in a 'risk premium' into the interest rate charges to account for this. The factors taken into account in

determining this premium include: the level of security, financial position and credit rating, the overall term of the loan, and the value of the loan.

6.5. The step by step process undertaken is outlined below:

STEP 1 – Assessing available market rates	In liaison with the Council’s Advisors, the interest rate the third party would be expected to pay if accessing funding from the market (based on amount/loan term etc) is estimated. This is to ensure the rate the Council is offering is competitive and not undercutting the market. Reference is also made in this consideration to subsidy (formerly known as state aid) implications.
STEP 2 – Assessing credit quality	The next consideration is credit quality – which may then consequently reduce/increase the rate. Factors that are taken into account include:- credit ratings (if applicable), the financial position of the borrower, what security is available etc.
STEP 3 – Assessment of Corporate Plan objectives	Finally, there is an overall assessment of the purpose of the third party loan and linking this to the Council’s Corporate Plan objectives – local factors based on the outcomes of the loan may have an influence on the rate charged.

6.6. All loans are agreed by full Council in line with the Council’s constitution. All loans will also be subject to regular monitoring.

7. Capital Expenditure

7.1. Capital spending decisions will appropriately reflect the aspirations and priorities included within the Corporate Plan and its supporting strategies.

7.2. Any scheme/ project to be added to the Capital Programme will be subject to a ‘gateway’ process and prioritised according to availability of resources and the longer-term impact on the Council’s financial position. The ‘gateway’ process will be undertaken in line with the Council’s agreed project management methodology with a robust business case being developed at the critical stages of project approval and initiation. This process will be overseen by the Council’s Transformation Board.

7.3. The business case will include the following considerations:

- A clear assessment of the cost of financing the capital scheme, net of revenue benefits, profiled over the lifetime of each scheme; and
- Commissioning and procuring for capital schemes will comply with the requirements set out in the Council’s Procurement Procedure Rules.

7.4. The Capital Strategy and the Capital Programme will be agreed by the Council in February each year as part of the budget setting process. The Medium Term Financial Plan, Asset Management Plan and Treasury Management Strategy will be considered at the same time. In year variations of spend (subject to budget tolerance levels) and the re-profiling of schemes will be considered and approved by Cabinet.

- 7.5. The Cabinet and the Finance and Performance Committee receive capital monitoring reports as part of the quarterly performance and financial monitoring reports.
- 7.6. Cabinet considers and approves new bids for inclusion in the capital programme. Approval to spend on individual capital schemes will only be given once this approval has been achieved.
- 7.7. Each approved scheme will be included in the Council's Transformation Programme and one of the Council's Alliance Management Team (AMT) will be assigned as Project Executive and will be responsible / accountable for the delivery of the scheme.
- 7.8. Wherever possible the Council will take a long term view of plans in order to assess affordability and the demand on future capital resources. It is essential for example to consider the lifespan and fitness for purpose of assets. This will be considered through asset management planning (condition surveys) and wider service based exercises e.g. leisure centre provision evaluation.
- 7.9. There is a clear demand for long term planning for capital and treasury management purposes. The council's current debt portfolio contains loans that mature up to 2032. The debt repayment profile needs to be managed alongside the longer term expectations for capital expenditure and funding forecasts.
- 7.10. Long-term forecasts are not easily predicted and the accuracy of all financial estimates will be limited. However, long-term forecasting is valuable in informing strategic plans taking account of the cumulative sustainability and affordability of existing and planned investments which will need to be repaid over future periods. For major projects and investment the funding and financial implications need to be planned well in advance.

8. Resourcing Capital Expenditure

- 8.1. To fund its capital investment, the Council will have access to limited sources of funding. The main sources of funding are:

Capital Receipts These will be yielded from the disposal of land and property. A programme of disposal will be agreed by the Cabinet. This will be informed by the asset management planning process. In considering disposals the Council will take account of: potential loss of income from investment properties, projected saving in running costs, and capital costs of major investment required, assessment against fitness of premises for purpose and current patterns of need

The Secretary of State has allowed the flexible use of capital receipts. It is considered that individual local authorities will be best placed to decide which projects will be most effective for their area. The key criteria to use when deciding whether expenditure can be funded by the capital receipts flexibility is that it is forecast to generate ongoing savings. If the Council plans to use this funding option a proposal will be prepared setting out the planned use, listing the projects and the expected savings and/ or improvements in service

outcomes for each project, and the impact on the Council's prudential indicators.

Borrowing Capital projects that cannot be funded from any other source can be funded from borrowing. Local Authorities can borrow to fund schemes where it is prudent to do so. They need to consider their ability to pay for the borrowing. The levels of borrowing are determined by using the indicators set out in the Prudential Code. The borrowing repayment and interest charges on the loan need to be met from existing revenue budgets or identify them as new growth in the annual budget setting process and factor them into the MTFP.

The Chief Finance Officer will make an assessment of the overall prudence, affordability and sustainability of the total borrowing requested and the impact of the Council's borrowing will be reported in the Treasury Management Strategy alongside the Prudential Indicators required by CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance. The Chief Finance Officer will also determine whether the borrowing should be from internal resources or whether to enter into external borrowing. This decision making will be undertaken in line with the Council's Treasury Strategy and will be reported to the Audit & Accounts Committee as part of the monitoring of treasury management activity.

Revenue Funding The Council may use revenue budgets to fund capital expenditure. This may be via a capital reserve which has been established to finance capital expenditure as an alternative to external borrowing. The Council will formally review such reserves and their application both as part of the budget setting process and at finalisation of the annual accounts.

S106 contributions The principal purpose of S106 agreements is to support individual planning applications in line with the Council's planning policies. Wider contributions are constrained by legislation and have to be negotiated and justified. The Council will ensure these are where possible focussed towards corporate priorities subject to the legislative constraints.

External Grant Funding The Council has a history of success in bidding for grants from a number of sources. There is a risk of reacting to funding opportunities informed by external priorities rather than chasing those that match the Council's priorities/ needs. The Council will seek to ensure that bids are submitted to support investment that is directed to the commitments made in the Corporate Plan.

Partnership Funding There are a number of examples where the Council has attracted third party funding from partners e.g. leisure centre investment from long-term contractor. The Council is aware of the need to be innovative and to work closely with the private, public and voluntary Sectors to deliver outcomes in line with the Corporate Plan priorities at a time when there will be reduced levels of capital resources. Any such investments will be considered only if they are more cost effective than the Council investing directly.

9. Forecast Expenditure and Resources

- 9.1. Paragraph 2 and Annex A of the MTFP Appendix A presents the capital programme including detail about the major elements of the programme and

shows how they are funded or where they give rise to a borrowing requirement:

Capital Programme	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	2027/28 £	Total £
Expenditure:						
Asset Management	1,187,950	1,038,610	3,716,530	2,259,350	2,754,790	10,957,230
Housing Grants	1,774,000	2,220,390	2,200,000	2,200,000	2,200,000	10,594,390
ICT Strategy	52,050	161,570	40,560			254,180
Fleet Management	181,600	678,250	27,500	1,496,200	1,071,600	3,455,150
Leisure	2,589,890	793,440	140,000	100,000		3,623,330
Regeneration	106,750	443,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	699,750
Levelling Up Fund	1,326,350	17,991,710	4,365,450		600,000	24,283,510
Waste collection			932,960			932,960
Other schemes	56,140		200,000			256,140
Total Programme	7,274,730	23,326,970	11,673,000	6,105,550	6,676,390	55,056,640
Financed by:						
External Contributions	5,062,770	18,001,650	4,132,960	2,200,000	2,200,000	31,597,380
Planning Obligations	83,560	25,000				108,560
Revenue Reserves	30,500	16,500	35,000		1,000	83,000
Capital Reserves			1,000,000		600,000	1,600,000
Earmarked Reserves	56,140					56,140
Borrowing	2,041,760	5,283,820	6,505,040	3,905,550	3,875,390	21,611,560
Total Financing	7,274,730	23,326,970	11,673,000	6,105,550	6,676,390	55,056,640

10. Long-term Considerations

10.1. There a number of functions where there are long term capital spending liabilities have been identified.

10.2. Asset Management Plan The Council is developing a revised Asset Management Strategy to ensure the future delivery of efficient asset management. This work is being progressed following the recent completion of updated condition surveys which have provided the 30-year costs of

maintaining the general fund asset stock. The MTFP includes this iteration up to 2027/28, the development of the plan will look further into the long-term:

	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	2027/28 £	Total £
<i>Asset Management:</i>						
<i>Public buildings</i>	707,950	738,320	570,230	82,860	1,580,570	3,679,930
<i>Car parks</i>	400,000		131,020	576,030		1,107,050
<i>Public conveniences</i>		54,590	12,460	6,170	78,790	152,010
<i>Infrastructure/ waterways</i>	80,000	120,100				200,100
<i>Leisure centres</i>		33,470	2,660,760	1,380,560	932,460	5,007,250
<i>Depots & park buildings</i>		75,750	118,410	77,120	154,780	426,060
<i>Industrial units</i>		16,380	223,650	136,610	8,190	384,830
Asset Management	1,187,950	1,038,610	3,716,530	2,259,350	2,754,790	10,957,230

10.3. The overall outcomes of the surveys can be summarised as follows:

- A number of the Council's operational assets are dated in appearance and require investment;
- The Council's car parks require capital investment;
- There are structural issues associated with a number of the Council's buildings, which require resolution;
- There are urgent works related to health and safety requirements that need to be resolved; and
- Investment is required to the electrical and mechanical infrastructure of a number of buildings.

10.4. In order to address the uncertainty of affordability for the longer term plan, the Council agreed to a number of actions to reduce the impact of the necessary capital spending, which should be considered before investment in each of the assets is made: asset rationalisation, shared use of assets, reduction in specification and functionality, generate additional capital receipts, identify grants to support investment, generate additional revenue from asset holdings.

10.5. **Review of Strategic Land Holdings** In order to address a number of the considerations above the Council agreed to review its strategic land holdings with a view to developing options to either generate additional capital receipts or opportunities to generate ongoing financial returns. The outcome of this review is reflected in the revised programme funding.

- 10.6. **Leisure Centres** Given the age and condition of the leisure centres, the conditions surveys concluded that significant capital investment was required over the next 30 years in order that these assets remain fit for purpose.
- 10.7. The Council commissioned a review of its leisure centre provision in the context of its sports facility needs focusing on sports halls, swimming pools and other indoor provision. The purpose of undertaking this review was to inform the Council on options for future provision of council leisure centres and other sports facility based services.
- 10.8. The outcome from this review in effect set out a position statement on the suggested facility hierarchy and approach, along with recommendations for the phasing of future facility developments and rationalisation. The aim is to ensure that the Council can develop a more sustainable solution in relation to meeting customer needs, affordability and partner aspirations, whilst supporting the overall vision of the Council's Move More Strategy.
- 10.9. Major projects emerging from the review include works at Brough Park Leisure Centre to replace the pool and reconfigure the sports hall for which LUF funding has been secured.
- 10.10. The Future Leisure Provision review continues to consider options for the following significant refurbishment works:
- Replacement of South Moorlands Leisure Centre with smaller community pool and fitness offer
 - Refurbishment and essential works at Biddulph Valley Leisure Centre in addition to the works being undertaken as part of the carbon reduction programme partly funded by the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.
- 10.11. The indicative capital cost for these investments are significantly in excess of revenue savings. Consequently, it will be necessary for the Council to identify additional sources of capital investment or reductions in the capital costs, in order to deliver these improvements.
- 10.12. **Operational Depot Provision** Major investments in the operational depot facilities which have been leased/ licensed to Alliance Environmental Services Ltd (AES) has been deferred until the opportunity has been taken to review the requirements of AES in light of the scope of services provided and the emerging requirements of the national review of waste collection and recycling provision.

11. Debt, Borrowing & Treasury Management

- 11.1. Effective treasury management is critical to the safeguarding and management of the financial resources at the Council's disposal. Investment and borrowing decisions are made in accordance with the Council's formally adopted Treasury Management Strategy. The Treasury Management Strategy is presented annually and approved by Full Council.
- 11.2. There are key prudential indicators set in respect of the impact of capital expenditure. The report details the forecast borrowing requirement over a

four year period, the consequential borrowing costs and the impact of the Council's capital financing requirement (CFR). The CFR is total outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for either from revenue or capital resources, essentially the Council's underlying borrowing need.

11.3. The table below summarises the impact of the Council's capital expenditure plans on the CFR:

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
	actual	estimate	estimate	estimate	estimate	estimate
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Total CFR	10,679	12,497	17,517	23,652	27,057	30,355
Movement in CFR	408	1,818	5,020	6,135	3,405	3,298
Represented by:						
Net financing need for the year	619	2,042	5,284	6,505	3,906	3,875
Less Minimum & Voluntary Revenue Provision	(211)	(224)	(264)	(370)	(501)	(577)
Movement in CFR	408	1,818	5,020	6,135	3,405	3,298

11.4. Where a borrowing requirement is identified, an assessment takes place on the most cost effective way to fund this. This could result in 'external borrowing' from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), other Local Authorities, direct from the market or by utilising lease arrangements.

11.5. Alternatively, 'internal borrowing' (the use of cash balances) could be used temporarily, particularly in the current interest rate climate where borrowing rates are currently high and predicted to fall towards the end of the MTFP. This is kept under careful review balancing temporary availability of cash reserves with interest rate forecasts.

11.6. The Council's forward debt projections are shown in the table below in relation to the CFR:

	March 23 Actual £'000	March 24 Estimate £'000	March 25 Estimate £'000	March 26 Estimate £'000	March 27 Estimate £'000	March 28 Estimate £'000
External Borrowing	7,604	7,604	11,604	15,604	18,104	20,604
Other long-term liabilities*	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gross Debt at 31 March	7,604	7,604	11,604	15,604	18,104	20,604
<i>Change in Debt position</i>	(5,000)	0	4,000	4,000	2,500	2,500
CFR	10,679	12,497	17,517	23,652	27,057	30,355
(Under)/ over borrowing**	(3,075)	(4,893)	(5,913)	(8,048)	(8,953)	(9,751)

*Other long-term liabilities will include Right-of-Use assets under accounting standard IFRS16 to be adopted from 2024/25. These are assets formerly known as operating leases which will be included on the balance sheet and therefore increase the CFR, similar to the former treatment of Finance Leases. The impact is expected to be immaterial therefore is not included at this stage. Should any changes be significant, the CFR limit and forecast will be revised during the year.

** Subject to considerations around whether to externally / internally borrow

12. Risk Management

- 12.1. There are a number of key risks that will impact upon the successful implementation of the Council's Capital Strategy.
- 12.2. The Council operates effective risk management through its Risk Management Framework. Risk management is the process of identifying risks, evaluating their potential consequences and determining the most effective methods of managing them and/or responding to them. It is both a means of minimising the costs and disruption to the Council caused by undesired events and of ensuring that the element of risk in all activities is properly understood.
- 12.3. In order to manage risk effectively, the risks associated with each capital project need to be systematically identified, analysed, influenced and monitored. It is important to identify the appetite for risk by each scheme and for the capital programme as a whole, especially when investing in capital assets held primarily for financial returns.
- 12.4. An assessment of risk should therefore be built into each individual capital project and the major risks that identified should be recorded in the Projects Risk Register which is reported to the Council's Audit & Accounts Committee.
- 12.5. The risks associated with the Capital Strategy are detailed below with the mitigating actions:

Risk	Mitigating Actions
Diminishing Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) carefully monitored and managed• New grant / funding opportunities explored• Partnership opportunities explored to share investment
Project Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spending / Funding closely monitored• Projects managed through the Council's project management methodology• Major projects reported through the council's performance framework
Commercial Investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exposure to non-repayment carefully managed through the contract management arrangements• Disinvestment potential will be regularly considered
VAT Partial Exemption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each capital investment will be closely reviewed to assess its VAT implications.