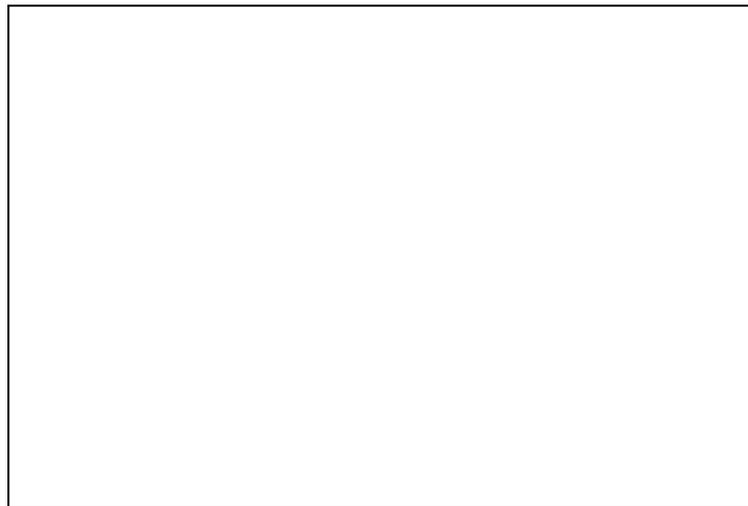


**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME  
BOROUGH COUNCIL  
ASSET MANAGEMENT  
STRATEGY  
2018/19 - 2021/22**



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## INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Property is a technically difficult asset to provide and maintain, slow to change and can be expensive to run. If the Authority is to get the best out of its use of land and buildings, it is important that it has a clear vision of what it expects from its properties, and that it resources them appropriately.
- 1.2** Good practice demands that an organisation's property estate must be regularly reviewed and actively managed to ensure that it supports changing needs and offers continuing value for money. Any established review process in a Local Authority context should ensure effective engagement of Senior Officers, Councillors and from the operational service units that occupy the properties. Additionally it is vitally important that users of Council-owned land or premises, along with other stakeholders (including local residents), are afforded the opportunity to comment upon Council decisions affecting property. This may be particularly important in cases where the Council is seeking to dispose of, or disinvest in, land or property. In such cases consultation should be proportionate to the scale and nature of any such decisions.
- 1.3** In order to demonstrate that the Council is managing its resources effectively, in the context of an overall aim of delivering efficient public services, the Council must produce a suite of key documents on an annual basis; the Asset Management Strategy/Plan is one of these documents (others include the Council Plan, the annual budget, the Capital Strategy and the Medium Term Financial Strategy). Up to date Government guidance and acknowledged best practice has informed the structure and context of this Strategy.



## **CONTEXT**

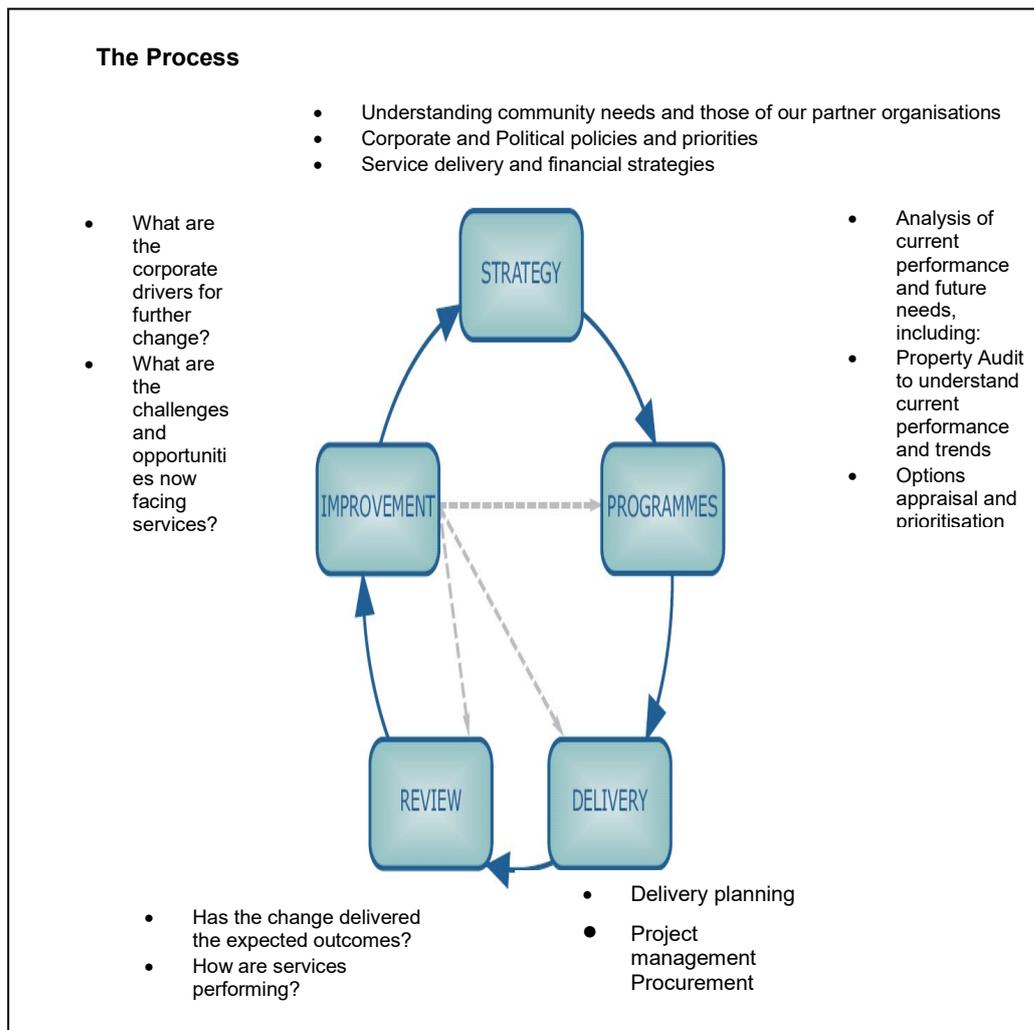
- 2.1** The Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme is part of the conurbation of North Staffordshire. It is the most populated district in Staffordshire with a population of around 125,000 and has an area of 81 square miles. The two main towns within the Borough are Newcastle-under-Lyme and Kidsgrove and there is an extensive rural area to the west/south-west of the urban area.
- 2.2** The industrial base of the Borough has changed significantly in the last century, with the closure of local coal mines and the development of the distribution sector. Service industries are the largest employers in the area, with the number of people employed in water, energy and construction industries being higher than average. The presence of Keele University with the growing number of hi-tech, research and medical technology businesses in its Science and Innovation Park, along with the medical school demonstrates the potential for added value growth of the area. The university plans to increase its capacity and take on up to 25% more students by 2021 along with the inevitable increase in academic staff.
- 2.3** Newcastle town centre is recognised as being one of two strategically important centres in the North Staffordshire conurbation, with further growth predicated upon its good connections to major transport routes. In particular the emerging investment in HS2 and other transportation links means that Newcastle will become part of a wider West Midlands “commuter belt” connecting people to Birmingham and London to the south and cities in the north such as Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow.
- 2.4** There are ongoing reductions in funding provided to local authorities, central government and its agencies, arising from the need to restrain public expenditure to rebalance public finances following the global economic recession that began with the banking crisis in 2008. Services remain under pressure to reduce costs and to keep fixed outgoings such as property related costs under review. At the same time, the Council’s own resources available to finance capital projects have diminished and need replenishing before any substantial further capital investments can be made. For some time now the Council has been increasingly reliant upon receipts from land and property disposals to fund future capital programmes and this continues to be the case.

## **MAIN ELEMENTS OF GOOD ESTATE MANAGEMENT**

- 2.5** The main elements of good asset management for public authorities are listed below:
- Leadership – political, corporate and technical.

- Culture – establishing an environment that sets high standards and measures performance.
- Strong customer focus – consultation and feedback undertaken in the context of wider public interest.
- Clarity of Structure, Roles and Responsibilities.
- Resources and Capacity – adequate staff, time and funding.
- Clear Governance – support of senior management and political leadership.
- Data – decisions should be properly informed.
- Sustainability – outcomes are sustainable organisationally, environmentally and financially.

**2.6** In order to facilitate good asset management it is also necessary to design a process that can be readily understood by all interested parties and, most importantly, be clear to those involved with administering it. It is proposed to continue with a five stage process for asset management in this Council as described in the annotated diagram below:



## 1. Strategy

This document is the strategy at the head of the diagram which seeks to clarify the Council's approach to asset management, particularly balancing the corporate context with service delivery requirements.

2. Programmes

The programmes of work should be derived from the strategy and these will typically relate to investment in retained stock and disposal of property where there is no evidence of strategic or operational service need to keep it.

3. Delivery

Delivery of agreed programmes is the vital ingredient that translates the strategy into action and recent experiences of property disposals demonstrate the importance of good project management.

4. Review

Continual review is a key element of the process too in order to ensure that the property estate continues to support efficient service delivery.

5. Improvement

The latter should lead into improvement planning in order to ensure that any change in direction in corporate priorities can be responded to.

## **2.7 BENEFITS OF GOOD ASSET MANAGEMENT**

- Improved services through better buildings and co-location of services
- Improvements in efficiency, which generate financial savings
- Reduced maintenance backlog
- Better utilisation of property
- Release of capital through sale of surplus assets
- Potential to drive regeneration outcomes both economic and housing growth

## **2.8 ASSET MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE**

### **Office/premises rationalisation programme - Castle House**

The Council has relocated its main office headquarters (in Merrial Street) to Castle House (built on the site of the former St Giles' and St George's School) to facilitate the redevelopment of the site of the Civic Offices, the former Sainsbury's site and adjoining car parks. As a result of the office relocation the public can now gain access to a wider range of public services under one roof and in addition the Council (along with the County Council and Police) will achieve significant future and ongoing revenue savings.

The Borough Council has vacated the Guildhall (the location of its Customer Services function) and the overspill offices in St. Georges Chambers, Merrial Street in addition to the former Civic Offices. Also Staffordshire County Council

has vacated the Registrars' office at Sidmouth Avenue, a property which is owned by the Borough Council.

2.8.1 The Guildhall - discussions are ongoing with a number of community groups with the aim of them taking a lease of these premises in order that our communities can still access a range of support services provided by the community and voluntary sectors.

2.8.2 St Georges Chambers offices - in view of the Council's ongoing interest in the ground floor retail premises in this area it is proposed to market the offices to let in the first instance with the rental income contributing towards the Council's income from commercial premises' rents.

2.8.3 Offices Sidmouth Avenue - options in respect of this property are currently being explored with the intention being to secure a "sensitive" disposal in order to ensure that any future development and/or use will respect the Conservation Area setting of the building.

## **2.9 Knutton Depot**

The depot premises has been adapted and changed to accommodate a new Recycling and Waste Service which commenced in July 2016. The recycling operation is now run in-house. Also the office element of the depot accommodates a range of services that are more conducive to the location and services available (e.g. taxi licensing which enables a more convenient interface with the garage function).

## **2.10 Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy**

In March 2017 Cabinet approved The Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy. This strategy identifies a range of strategic aims and objectives for future open space and green infrastructure planning, provision, management, maintenance and alternative use to ensure that these assets fulfil their potential to deliver a wide range of environmental and social benefits. This will form part of the evidence base for the joint local plan and inform decision making in the local planning authority's Development Management function.

Within this Strategy a number of sites have been identified as requiring the preparation of options for at least partial development; these include land adjacent to Bradwell Crematorium and non-green belt land at Birchenwood, Kidsgrove. The intention of this work is to identify a suitable range of land uses including any requirements to meet Council needs – e.g. open space, burial grounds etc. as well as land suitable for disposal and redevelopment.

## **2.11 Playing Pitch Strategy**

In February 2015 the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) was adopted. This identified a number of sites where there is no local demand thereby rendering them suitable and appropriate for alternative use or development. The site at Knype Way Bradwell is one of these sites.

The above strategies will seek to prioritise and direct resources into the areas which provide the greatest benefit to the community and to identify areas where disinvestment, change of use or disposal may be appropriate.

## **DEVELOPING A CLEAR PROPERTY STRATEGY FOR NEWCASTLE**

### **Scale of Activities**

**2.12** The Borough Council is a significant property owner within its administrative boundaries with substantial legacies around the two main town centres of Newcastle and Kidsgrove as well as in the urban villages/rural hinterland.

**2.13** As at March 2017 the Council's property assets were recorded in the Asset Register at a value of just under £78.5m. The properties are valued in accordance with RICS Appraisal and Valuation Standards ("Red Book"). This involves a variety of valuation methods dependent upon the particular asset and its use. This estate comprises a mix of property, some 186 buildings and various land holdings which form two distinct portfolios, the Commercial/Regeneration Portfolio and the Operational Portfolio (see section 4).

#### (a) Operational Portfolio

**2.14** This consists of land and buildings from which the Council carries out its own business activities/service delivery. This comprises a mix of 76 buildings that are typical of a local authority estate and result from the history of diverse activities in which local authorities have been involved in the past.

**2.15** Examples of the existing operational properties include Jubilee 2 Health and Wellbeing Centre, the works depot (which provides workshops, stores and garaging for the Council's direct works departments) and the Cemetery office. The Council also has a significant shared interest in the new Castle House premises referred to above.

**2.16** The primary objective for the operational stock is to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. So the condition of the properties is kept under review and essential maintenance is prioritised accordingly (see later reference to the 2018 Stock Condition Review. From time to time it will become evident that properties have reached the end of their natural life – i.e. when the property is uneconomical to repair in order to fulfil the service needs.

**2.17** The Council no longer holds social housing stock but still owns and maintains significant land holdings within these neighbourhoods. This land is kept under review and presents opportunities for alternative use or development in liaison with the stock-transfer company, Aspire Housing.

**2.18** The Council owns and manages approximately 1800 acres of land for the purpose of providing parks, gardens, outdoor sports facilities,

children's playgrounds, Local Nature Reserves, woodlands, allotments, cemeteries, footpaths and cycle ways for the benefit and enjoyment of the public. The strategic context of the use of these spaces is provided in the Green Space Strategy or other key strategies.

**(b) Commercial Portfolio**

- 2.19** The Commercial Portfolio comprises land and buildings let to business tenants on the basis of open market rents, as well as the Council's fee paying car parks (Newcastle Town Centre / environs). Whilst the basic approach to the commercial portfolio lettings is market-driven there may be occasions where the Council's economic regeneration objectives influence this position. Any such adjustment to purely market-led criteria has to be approached with caution to avoid distorting the market and creating a spiral of decline in investor confidence. A commonly used approach, particularly in difficult economic conditions which are primarily occurring in the retail sector (is to incentivise prospective tenants with rent-free periods, where necessary, as opposed to reducing market rental levels. There have however been some rent reductions in the retail sector in line with current market evidence; if appropriate and necessary this practice will continue in order to both promote economic growth and to optimise rental income.
- 2.20** This Portfolio comprises 97 freehold buildings and 13 leasehold units: town centre premises including retail, office and leisure uses along with a number of premises on industrial estates. There are also street markets and hybrid premises (operational properties which have an element of commercially let space within them).
- 2.21** The Portfolio itself has arisen out of various regeneration initiatives that the Council has undertaken from the 1930s onwards when it undertook the development of the Lancaster Building shops and office complex at the time of an economic depression.
- 2.22** The Council has not made any additions to its commercial portfolio for a number of years; the most recent involved the construction of a small block of industrial units for the small business/new enterprise market at Church Lane (Knutton) which remain fully let. Additionally the Council facilitated the development of a BREEAM "outstanding" commercial building at Chatterley Valley, known as Blue Planet, on land which we held as a result of an intervention in the market to deal with a heavily contaminated parcel of land. These premises are let to JCB who are operating their world logistics hub from the site. JCB also have an option to purchase adjacent Council owned land which would facilitate future expansion on this site.
- 2.23** The commercial portfolio is constantly kept under review to ensure rental income is maximised and costs kept to a minimum. The Council in March 2015 disposed of 2-10 Hassell Street which comprised 4 tenanted ground floor shops and 2 floors of vacant offices that were in a dilapidated condition. The purchaser converted the two floors of offices

into residential accommodation and these studios/flats are now let. A similar scenario arose in respect of 15-21 Brunswick Street, in this case there were 3 ground floor shops and 2 floors above which were vacant and very dilapidated. These premises were sold in June 2015.

## **ASSET MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

**2.24** Asset Management Policies will be influenced by various factors including current government policy; the needs of the community; the needs of the organisation in delivering services and economic conditions. Taking account of these the Council's key policies for asset management are as follows:

- a) The Authority will only hold sufficient property to meet a service need or strategic objective;
- b) Property is a corporate asset and will be managed as such;
- c) Service demands on the estate will be met in the most cost effective manner available to the Authority;
- d) Properties held for service needs will be suitable for their intended purpose and;
- e) The condition of the Authority's estate will be maintained at the best possible level to meet the needs of the operational activities (taking account of available resources) with best endeavours being used to optimise the environmental performance of all properties

## **PROPERTY-RELATED ASSET MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

**2.25** In the context provided above it is appropriate that the Council has clear objectives relating to the use of its property assets and these are summarised below:

- a) To facilitate and contribute to the achievement of corporate priorities and objectives;
- b) To support service delivery requirements;
- c) To optimise capital receipts from disposal of surplus land/property to provide funds for capital programme expenditure;
- d) To achieve optimum utilisation of property assets;
- e) To optimise income from the Commercial Portfolio;
- f) To invest available funding in areas of greatest need or opportunity (including essential maintenance and repair);
- g) To demonstrate the efficient use of resources on land and property owned by the Authority;
- h) To minimise the opportunity cost of holding land and property assets;
- i) To keep the property portfolio under review (at least annually) with the aim of disposing of land or property for which there is no strategic, financial, operational or other public interest reason for retention;

- j)** To minimise the adverse environmental impacts of the portfolio and;
- k)** To engage with local community and third sector organisations to optimise the effective and efficient use of community assets;

## **A. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT:**

### **Government Policy**

**3.1** Many Government initiatives, policy statements and/or guidance influence the Authority's asset policies, including:

- The Quirk review of ownership of public assets
- The Gershon Review, and the drive to improve efficiency
- The Prudential Code for the management of capital finance
- Leaner and Greener Report – Delivering effective estate management
- Leaner and Greener II – Putting Building to Work
- Penfold Review
- Laying the foundations of a Housing Strategy for England
- The Localism Act - Community Right to Bid
- The National Planning Policy Framework
- Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015

### **Statutory Responsibilities**

**3.2** The Authority as an employer, a landowner, a landlord and a provider of services, has a wide range of responsibilities with an implication for accommodation including:

- The legislative framework in respect of buildings
- A range of health and safety legislation, EEC requirements. HSE best practice and guidance notes, Industry standards and Insurance requirements.
- Carbon reduction and energy efficiency legislation and requirements.
- Equality Act 2010. This does not simply encompass accessibility considerations and has to be taken in to account in virtually all development and maintenance work which is carried out to ensure that every possible aspect of disability has been considered when implementing work.
- Management of the risks associated with property assets including regular maintenance and servicing to address matters such as:
  - i) Legionella – A managed programme of water testing and preventative measures are carried out including weekly flushing regimes, monthly temperature tests, bi-annual bacteria testing and, as required, physical system cleansing. A robust legionella policy is in place for the council as required by law.
  - ii) Asbestos – An on-going programme of surveys and management together with the use of asbestos registers and regular monitoring to prevent the release of dangerous fibres and warn of the

presence of asbestos across the portfolio. A robust asbestos policy is in place for the council as required by law.

- iii) Fire Safety – The Authority undertakes Fire Risk Assessments in respect of its properties and tests fire safety equipment e.g. alarms on an annual basis. Weekly, monthly and annual testing of fire monitoring and backup systems also take place as required by the legislation to ensure that fire systems are maintained.
- iv) Gas Safety – Inspections and services are carried out on an annual basis to ensure that all gas appliances are safe to use. The correct pre-planned maintenance approach has also ensured that gas appliance failures are now very rare which has delivered a considerable saving in respect of reactive maintenance costs.
- v) Electrics - An ongoing program of periodic tests is carried out to fixed wiring as required by both legislation and our insurers together with Portable Appliance Testing and emergency lighting testing.
- vi) Lifts, pressure vessels, safety line, chimney maintenance - checks are carried in accordance with best practice.
- vii) Lightning Conductors – checked in accordance with best practice.
- viii) Routine inspection and repair/maintenance of assets including tree stock, playground stock, railings and structures, footpaths and roads etc.
- ix) Testing and maintenance of generators, air conditioning and mechanical services equipment.
- x) Glass and glazing assessment.

NB: The above summary is not an exhaustive list of statutory inspections/maintenance arrangements.

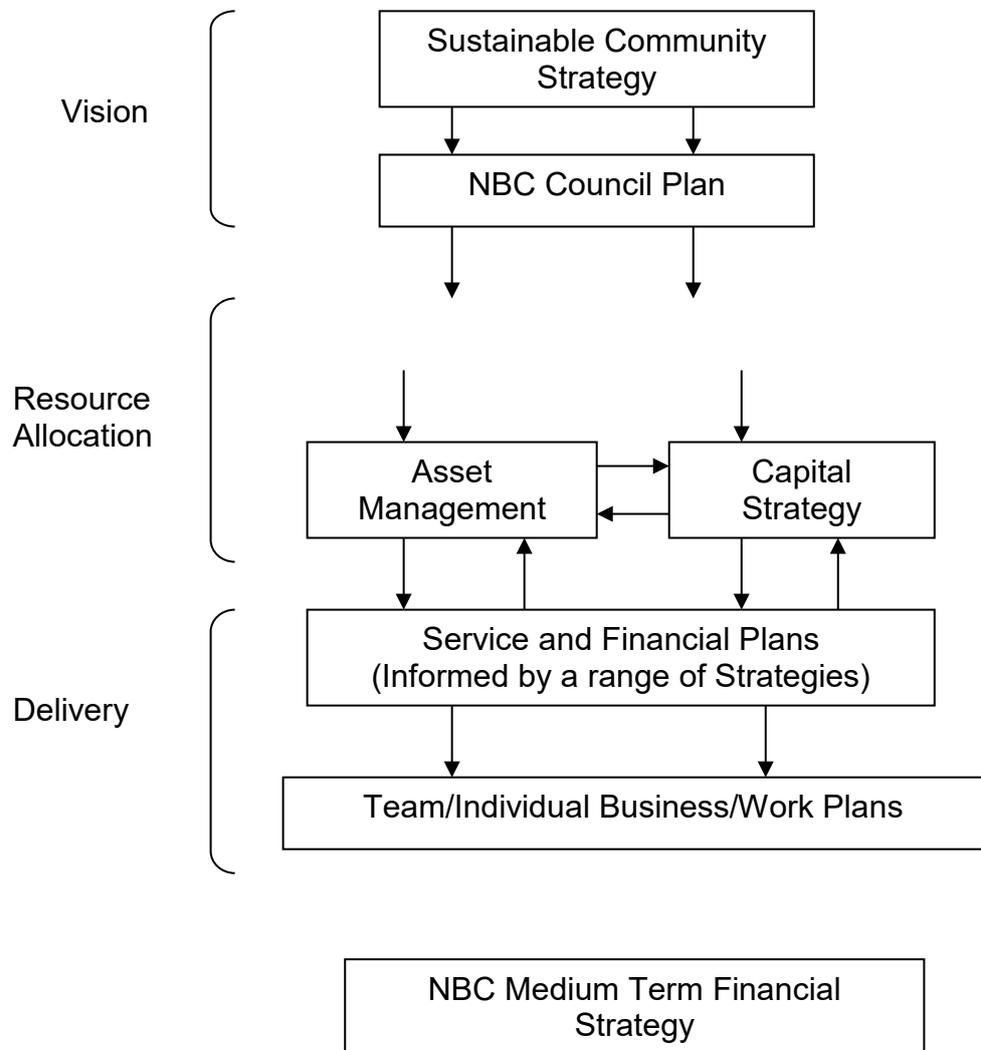
## **B. THE LOCAL CONTEXT**

**3.3** The Asset Management Strategy draws from a number of strategic Council documents including:

- Newcastle Partnership Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2020
- Council Plan – 2018 to 2022 (updated version due for approval September 2018)
- Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 and JLP Preferred Options Document 2018
- Medium Term Financial Strategy -2017/18 to 2021/22
- Capital Strategy 2015-2019
- General Fund Estimate Book Summary 2017/18
- Playing Pitch Strategy 2015
- Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy 2017
- Economic Development Strategy 2018-2023
- Housing Strategy 2016-2021
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2017
- Carbon Management Plan 2014
- The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Compact and Third Sector Commissioning Standards 2014-2018

- Safe and Stronger Community Strategy 2012-2017
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2018
- Contaminated Land Strategy 2014-19

The diagram below shows the relationship the Asset Management Strategy has with key Council/partner strategies/plans:



### **Links to Council Plan**

- 3.4** At the time of writing the Council Plan was in the process of being updated to run for the period from 2018 to 2022. It will have four main priority areas including ones relating to economic growth and Newcastle Town Centre, as well as one in relation to service delivery. It will remain important to ensure that this Strategy facilitates delivery of corporate and service priorities.

### **Funding the Council's Capital Programme**

- 3.5** Importantly, as referred to at paragraph 2.3, the other important and over-arching corporate management principle is that future Capital Programmes should be funded by the realisation of capital receipts as a first resort.

### **Performance Management Context**

- 3.6** The performance of the Authority's estate is subject to scrutiny by the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.7** Ongoing review of assets is a key task for both managers of Operational Services and Property-related staff. Such reviews have become formalised through a corporate officer working group, the Assets Review Group.
- 3.8** The land disposal programme is reviewed monthly by the Executive Management Team. Significant decisions are assessed and if agreed in principle then reported for a Cabinet decision. This may require consideration at the Capital Programme Review Group when capital expenditure over £20,000 may be required on a property or parcel of land.
- 3.9** The main performance indicator pertaining to the Council's commercial property portfolios is the percentage of the investment portfolio which is vacant.

### **Partner Organisations**

- 3.10** Community leadership is often delivered through partnership, and it is probably seen in the best light when it tackles "cross-cutting" issues. The Newcastle Partnership is the strategic partnership for Newcastle and brings together key players from the public, private and voluntary sectors with the aim of enhancing the quality of life of local communities. The Partnership is the mechanism for the delivery of the statutory partnership function in the Borough. Two key priorities have been identified around enhancing economic growth and tackling vulnerability, based on the Council's key strategies. The Partnership has developed a Work Programme focused on these key priorities and has in place a number of projects designed to deliver against this Work Programme. Our ability to lead and contribute to partnerships is increasingly important to help us secure improvements in service delivery through the physical estate for the residents, investors and visitors to the Borough.

### **Staffordshire and SOT Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)**

- 3.11** The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is a private sector-led partnership with the public sector which aims to drive economic growth and create jobs. Formed in 2011, the LEP's vision is to create 50,000 jobs and increase the size of the economy by 50% by 2021. The LEP creates opportunities for business by providing advice, support and skills development; creating the opportunity for businesses to access funding through funding streams such as the Growing Places Fund, driving forward strategic investment in infrastructure and major initiatives such as the City Deal – Powerhouse Central and through the Make it team that provides support to companies that want to re-locate or grow in the local area.
- 3.12** The Council's Land Disposal Strategy supports this growth initiative by creating the opportunity to dispose of surplus land to facilitate economic growth and add to the housing offer available within the Borough in line with both the LEP growth ambition and Government policy. Additionally, the master planning exercise in respect of the University growth corridor at Keele (which includes the former Keele Golf site) has the potential to support further development of Keele University & Science park as a major employment and growth hub within the Borough (subject to the outcome of the Local Plan process).

### **Newcastle Business Improvement District and Go Kidsgrove**

- 3.13** Newcastle Business Improvement District (BID) and Go Kidsgrove are private sector-led partnerships which have been established to bring together local businesses and the Council to improve the economic fortunes of the town centres.

3.13.1 Newcastle Business Improvement District was established in October 2015, it is a partnership, funded by a membership levy that supports the promotion and development of Newcastle Town Centre delivering projects, events and activities under three objectives. They are: (i) Promote – to develop and promote the strengths and characteristics of the town centre;

(ii) Develop – to develop a safe, attractive and appealing experience for visitors to enjoy

(iii) Investment and Development – To build on the strengths of the businesses and organisations of Newcastle under Lyme to support and promote growth, development and a sense of business community.

As with all BIDs it will run for a 5 year term and will be seeking renewal in 2020.

3.13.2 Kidsgrove Town Centre CIC, which trades as GO Kidsgrove, is a private sector-led partnership which has been established to bring together local businesses, organisations, the local community and the Council to improve the economic well-being of Kidsgrove and surrounding areas.

### **Disposals to Third Sector**

- 3.14** For a number of years, the Council has pursued a policy of disposal of Assets to the 'Third sector' through the engagement of active community groups. The Council's disposal strategy in respect of these groups recognises the strengths of pro-active community organisations – independence, specialist knowledge of particular activities, community focus and access to third sector funding streams.
- 3.15** The Council seeks to support these organisations by adopting a number of different approaches to community engagement and management of assets. The approaches range from a totally devolved community management structure – where the asset is leased to an organisation who then assume complete control of it including repairs/maintenance, running costs etc. and who also receive and control income generated by the asset (e.g. letting to Newcastle Rugby Club) – through to a supported management structure where the Council retains responsibility for the costs associated with the asset and the income generated by it e.g. football pitches – and onto a “stewardship” role for the community where volunteers or Friends Groups provide an input and influence to the Council's management decisions.
- 3.16** In some cases this involves granting long leases of land and property to third sector organisations at nominal rentals. The grant of such leases, as opposed to outright disposal of the freehold, ensures that where such groups experience problems, (for example through loss of key members), the asset (land/property) returns to the Council (and the greater community) to be utilised again for a similar purpose or some other purpose outlined in the corporate priorities. Examples of successful leases (typically of 20/25 year duration) previously established by the Council include:
- Kidsgrove Ski Club
  - Newcastle Town Football Club
  - Newcastle and Hartshill Cricket Club
  - Newcastle Rugby Club

In late 2016 the Council completed a tender process to let the former North Staffordshire Special Adventure Playground which is now called The Brook Centre. The premises are now occupied by two organisations Approach, a dementia charity and Our Space, a children charity which support children and adults with disabilities and their families. In addition the Council is currently in discussion with a number of community groups in respect of leasing the Guildhall from which a range of community services will be delivered.

A further example of this approach is in respect of a Council owned car park is Audley where negotiations are ongoing with Audley Parish Council in respect of them being granted a long lease to continue the current use.

- 3.17** There are also a number of examples of community green spaces which are managed and/or leased by local community groups,

including:

Audley Millennium Green  
Lyme Valley Allotments

- 3.18** In addition the Facilities team have assisted community groups/sporting organisations in relation to project managing improvement schemes recent examples include the rebuilding of the bowls pavilion at Westland Sports Ground and the refurbishment of the Sports Centre on Lilleshall Road.

### **Capital Programme and Stock Condition**

- 3.19** Another key area relates to the maintenance and repair of the Council's operational land and buildings. Provision is made in the Council's General Fund Revenue Programme annually to meet the ongoing costs relating to land and property maintenance.

- 3.20** This future maintenance/repair work will be driven by the recently-commissioned stock condition survey. This will set out the current condition of operational and commercial portfolios as well as the structures. This exercise is required to identify likely/realistic short, medium and long term expenditure requirements which, in turn, will also inform a review of the Council's portfolio to identify premises which the Council may wish to dispose of. This will also identify major repairs requiring capital investment. In addition any assets which require urgent attention due to health and safety risks will be highlighted and prioritised to ensure that the Council complies with its statutory requirements. A first draft of this work has been received and work is now underway to moderate its findings taking account of other known considerations.

- 3.21** In assessing the future maintenance and repair of the Council's operational estate there will need to be a balance between providing the financial resources to undertake a pro-active maintenance programme and the risk that not doing so will impact on future capital costs (since the fabric of assets will deteriorate over time and maintenance work will become more costly due to this).

### **Structures - to include Bridges and Watercourses**

- 3.22** An asset register of all structures for which the Council are responsible has been prepared. The stock condition review (see 3.21) is being carried out on a sample of the structures which will provide a basis for a planned maintenance programme.

### **Carbon Reduction/Energy Efficiency**

- 3.23** The Council monitors energy use in all operational properties. It has been aiming to reduce energy usage and where it carries out repairs/improvements to the properties it seeks to reduce its carbon footprint/energy use further as a direct result of these works, thereby saving costs.

- 3.24** The Council published a Carbon Management Plan in 2011 (accredited by the Carbon Trust). This developed a Carbon Management Strategy which identified the drivers for carbon management, targets and objectives to be achieved and the strategic themes considered. In order to deliver the said objectives, the Plan sets out a number of projects; there were existing projects, planned/funded projects, short term projects and medium to long term projects.
- 3.25** The Carbon Management Plan established a 30 per cent targeted reduction in carbon emissions from the council's activities – working from a 2009/10 baseline to April 2017. This was achieved and cumulatively, there has been a reduction in emissions by 1,874 tonnes compared to the base line. This is a 45 per cent saving over the said plan period.
- 3.26** In parallel with the work on reducing carbon emissions, there has been a reduction in gas and electricity consumption within the Council's Buildings due to the effectiveness of energy efficiency measures installed in the past and the implementation of measures recommended following a full performance review of energy usage at the Jubilee 2 Health and Leisure Centre.
- 3.27** Castle House has been constructed to BREEAM "A" standard. It is envisaged that this will minimise energy and carbon emissions.
- 3.28** Looking forward, there are a number of Council buildings that use significant energy, namely the Jubilee 2 Health and Leisure Centre and the Knutton Depot. It is proposed that energy usage of these will be carefully reviewed and cost saving projects will be identified and undertaken.

### **Energy Performance Reviews**

- 3.29** In accordance with The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 all commercial property when it becomes subject to a lease renewal or a new letting is required to have a Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard of an E. This legislation came into effect in April 2018. This requirement is primarily the responsibility of the landlord. In mid-2017 the Council appointed a consultant to produce Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) in respect of a cross section of the commercial portfolio and if the rating was below an E a recommendations report of improvement works is required to raise the rating to this level.
- 3.30** The recommendations report illustrates how each improvement positively impacts on the grade of the EPCs, providing a number of alternatives, combinations and an optimum recommendation. Indicative costs of installing such measures and making improvements to reach the E rating should be included. This report also included an analysis of the pay-back period for the improvement works.

- 3.31** In the main ratings can be raised to an “E” by improving the lighting within the properties, a budget of £20,000 was allocated in the capital programme budget 2018/19.

### **Strategic Property Review**

- 3.32** It is essential that the Council has an efficient property assets approach to ensure that all opportunities to maximise use, rental income, resources and management are taken.
- 3.33** The Council is to commission a report to identify which properties, if any do not represent value for money. Where failing properties are disposed of, this will take pressure off capital budget requirements as the need for expenditure decreases. However, it should be recognised that there is a consequent loss of rental income
- 3.34** Over the long term, by investing in more efficient properties to increase and enhance their value, not only should the loss of income be retrieved by the increase in rental value of the asset, the asset itself will increase in value and the probability of a long term rental income will be enhanced considerably.
- 3.35** Each property asset from both portfolios will need to be scrutinised in detail in terms of operational use, maximisation of use, rental income, maintenance cost, capital requirements and general overheads in order that individual property needs or failings can be identified and this will deliver an overall strategic plan for all the property assets.
- 3.36** However, this exercise will also need to take in to account operational requirements and the need to hold some property for long term strategic and regeneration needs so there will be occasions when under-performing properties are retained.

## THE CURRENT ESTATE

**4.1** The Council owns a broad variety of over 186 properties (buildings) ranging from crematoria to sports centres to industrial premises. As previously indicated (paragraphs 2.12 to 2.23) the Council's property assets are divided into two portfolios – the operational and commercial portfolio – see below:-

### **Operational assets**

**4.2** In broad terms this is property that is held, occupied, used or contracted to be used on behalf of the authority in the direct delivery of services for which it has a responsibility, whether statutory or discretionary or for the service of strategic objectives of the authority. For reasons of simplicity we also include 'Community Assets' in this category.

**4.3** This category includes (not exhaustive list):

- Castle House
- Kidsgrove Town Hall Customer Service Centre
- Knutton Lane depot
- Jubilee 2 Health & Wellbeing Centre
- The Museum/Art Gallery
- Crematorium and Cemeteries
- Land associated with operational property
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Historic Buildings/Monuments
- Allotments
- Sports facilities and pitches
- Community Centres
- Off-street car parks
- Structures bridges, watercourses etc.
- CCTV infrastructure

### **Commercial Assets**

**4.4** These property assets are those held by the Council but not directly occupied, used or concerned in the delivery of services, although they are likely to align with the authority's strategic objectives. Examples in this category (list not exhaustive) mainly related to commercial land and property, leased/rented to other parties and generating income which include:

- Town Centre Retail Premises
- Industrial Units
- Offices
- Ground Leases
- Market

- Town Centre Car Parks

#### **Asset Transfers between Portfolios**

**4.5** There are occasions where assets can be transferred between portfolios as a result of changes to service delivery or corporate priorities; examples include the following:

- Pitfield House (Brampton Park) which was originally within the operational portfolio and is now let on a commercial basis as a Children's Nursery.
- Former Audley Council offices which is now let on a commercial basis to a local business.

## **ASSET REVIEWS**

**5.1** There is an expectation that the public bodies, responsible for the use of resources will continuously challenge its use of resources, and this Council has instituted a programme of reviews of its operational property portfolio, which is used to deliver services.

Property can be an expensive drain on both capital and revenue budgets, and is generally slow to change. It is essential that organisations like the Council have the right type of premises in the right locations, and, ideally, accommodation must be sufficiently flexible to be able to be adjusted to the changing needs of the service market. It must also be used as efficiently as possible; vacant or under-used space is an expensive waste of resources.

### **Funding the Council's Capital Programme**

**5.2** As referred to earlier, the Cabinet remain keen to maintaining the important overarching principle linking the function and purpose of this Strategy with the Council's Capital Programme. This means that the Council will seek to fund its future known capital programme needs through the annual asset management planning process by the identification of land or property in its ownership that is capable of, and appropriate for disposal.

**5.3** The capital receipts generated from any disposal of these assets will therefore fund the works/schemes identified in the Capital Programme which in turn assists the Council in achieving its corporate and service objectives. Significant progress has been made with securing receipts from land and property disposals, with the Council receiving just over £4.4m over the past four years; with a further £5.2m in the pipeline, at the time of writing, where terms have been agreed with purchasers. Contracts have been exchanged on one of these sites, terms agreed on a further two and detailed negotiations are underway in respect of the fourth. It is anticipated that these sites will bring much needed receipts but will also facilitate delivery of new housing to meet broader policy objectives of the Council.

### **Local Plan**

**5.4** A Joint Local Plan is being prepared in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council. This Plan will identify how much new land is required to supply our community's development needs over the next 15 to 20 years, and in which locations, to help ensure the borough and City of Stoke-on-Trent achieve sustainable economic growth.

The Council's published the Strategic Housing Market Assessment Review 2017 and the Strategic Housing Land Supply Assessment. This forms part of the evidence base for the Joint Local Plan, the former being the needs assessment and the latter the supply. The Council as landowner participated in the call for sites exercise which informed the Strategic Housing Land Supply Assessment.

The two Councils in February 2018 sought views from the public and other stakeholders on the Preferred Options Consultation Document. The document is an important stage in the preparation of the local plan.

The Preferred Options consultation document set out:

- A preferred development strategy for employment and housing for Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent
- Key strategic developments
- Revised vision, aims and objectives

The next stage of that process will be the preparation of a draft local plan.

### **Call for Sites – response to the local planning authority**

**5.5** The Call for Sites process seeks to identify a wide range of sites in order that a criterion-based assessment can be used to determine the most appropriate and sustainable land uses for such sites. It is important to distinguish the Council's role as a landowner from its function as the local planning authority. This Strategy deals with land / property matters on behalf of the Council as a land owner. By responding to the Call for Sites it is inviting the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to consider the suitability of the Council sites alongside those promoted by third party land owners, with the aim of the process determining the most appropriate use for the land. Cabinet has not approved the disposal or redevelopment of these sites it has merely submitted a list of sites for consideration by the LPA.

**5.6** Equally important is the need to acknowledge at this stage of the Local Plan process that consideration of sites as part of the Call for Sites process does not mean they will be allocated for the desired use.

### **Disposal Programme for Under-utilised Assets (to fund the Capital Programme)**

#### **Operational service requirements**

**5.7** Each year operational managers are challenged to ensure that any underutilised/surplus space is identified and, where appropriate, allocated for potential alternative use or disposal. This approach is consistent with the objective of disposing of land or property for which there is no strategic, financial, operational or other public interest reason for retention. Notable disposals in 2015-2018 included the retail/office premises where the upper floors required significant expenditure and green space that does not form part of the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy.

#### **Identification of potential sites for disposal**

**5.8** An assessment of all Council owned land is ongoing in order to continue to identify land that is considered to have a better alternative use. These sites fall into one of the following categories:

- Brownfield sites not required for operational use;
- Greenfield sites that do not form part of the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy Sites identified in the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy that are considered to have a better alternative use (i.e. not required to fulfil the objectives of the Strategy);
- Sites identified in the current Playing Pitch Strategy where there is no local demand or business case for retention;
- Sites identified in the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy which form a small part of a larger site and the removal of which would not adversely impact on the function or enjoyment of green space.
- Sites identified in the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy that require master-planning.
- Operational land and buildings where there is no strategic, financial or other public interest reason for retention.

**5.9** It is estimated (subject to planning permission being granted, there being no significant abnormal costs and to the sites selling at open market value) that the capital receipts likely to be generated in respect of the residential and miscellaneous sites listed in Appendix 4 is in the region of £8m.

#### **5.10 University Growth Corridor**

The Council's land interests at the former Keele golf course and surrounding area have been assimilated into a jointly commissioned master planning exercise with Keele University. The primary purpose of this piece of work at this stage is to demonstrate the feasibility of redeveloping this site along with the Keele University owned land. In view of the Green Belt nature of these sites it is envisaged that the Master Plan will assist the local planning authority in considering the most sustainable form of development and land use.

#### **5.11 Site of the former Knutton Recreation Centre**

Knutton Recreation Centre was vacated in 2012 when Jubilee 2 opened and the premises were demolished in 2016. The site forms part of a potential regeneration area within the wider Knutton area, the main partner being Staffordshire County Council. This site would benefit from master planning in order to both prepare a comprehensive land use framework for this area (following the previous Housing Market Renewal interventions) and establish key principles around infrastructure costs and sharing of net value.

### **Consultation Arrangements on Future Disposals**

**5.12** The primary purpose of the consultation on potential land disposals is to identify any physical, technical or other constraints that might affect the scope/opportunity for alternative use or development being pursued. The outcome of such consultation exercises, taken together with desktop technical assessments, allows the Council as a landowner to consider the latter approach. Importantly it is considered that the Town Planning

processes (Local Plan and Planning Applications) should consider the appropriateness of land or property being developed or used for alternative purposes rather than the Council as landowner making potentially subjective judgements.

- 5.13** The consultation process approach involves Ward councillors being notified prior to the start of the process; notices being placed on site and; the adjacent property owners being notified along with the Parish/Town Council, where relevant (see Appendix 1 and 2). The consultation timetable is set out below. This arrangement is considered to be generally proportionate and appropriate to the majority of sales of both land and property.

Property Description	Consultation Approach	
	Local members (prior to general public)	General public
Publicly accessible open space >0.5 ha.	3 weeks	6 weeks
Publicly accessible open space <0.5 ha.	3 weeks	3 weeks
Grazing / agricultural land >1 ha.	3 weeks	3 weeks
Grazing / agricultural land <1 ha.	2 weeks	2 weeks
Operational estate with active community use	2 weeks	4 weeks
Commercial / industrial premises	N/A	N/A

- 5.14** There will however be some circumstances in respect of certain disposals, such as the disposal of disused public toilets, where a public consultation process will not be necessary or may be scaled to a more proportionate level. Other examples could include land or property where the future use is consistent with the present use (e.g. a shop premises in a shopping parade) where there is unlikely to be any public interest at stake. The approach to consultation in each case will seek to ensure that any public/stakeholder consultation is proportionate to the particular disposal.

### **Car Parks**

- 5.15** In view of the Council's aspirations for strengthening the Town Centre economy it will be important to keep the town centre car parks under review with a view to either optimising their use or to facilitate regeneration.
- 5.16** There are approximately 35 non-fee paying car parks; some are attached to operational/recreational facilities whilst others are used as neighbourhood car parks. A review will be undertaken to assess the usage, maintenance cost and general overheads of these assets. The car park on Blackfriars Road, Newcastle is adjacent to land that was previously let to the Greenhous garage. In 2017 they vacated the land and given the car park is underutilised Cabinet at its meeting in January 2018 delegated the removal of the off street parking order, to the

Executive Director (Regeneration and Development), following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.

### **Commercial Portfolio**

**5.17** The commercial portfolio (including the Market) in 2017/18 generated a gross income of about £1.2 million and provides business accommodation for over 200 small to medium sized businesses. It is important that the condition of these units is kept under review in order to both protect the Council's income and to ensure that the units are fit for purpose. Once the commissioned stock condition survey has been fully appraised the commercial estate will be reviewed with the aim of ensuring the Council is achieving value for money (optimising income and reducing liabilities). The review may also assist the Council in identifying future investment opportunities to provide both development outcomes and revenue income or longer term capital receipts.

### **5.18 Markets**

Cabinet has agreed to an external partner being sought to operate and manage the Council's town centre markets; at the time of writing the council is in detailed negotiations in this regard. It is anticipated that outsourcing the management and operation of the market will ensure greater flexibility to promote the market and bring in new customers and traders, at a time when competing demands and priorities are being placed on council resources. In other parts of the country, declining markets have been revitalised by bringing in new operators – and it is anticipated that a similar scheme would benefit the existing market traders in the town centre.

### **5.19 Community Centres**

The Council is continuing to explore options for the long term sustainability and management of the Community Centres in partnership with the community and voluntary sector and to review the management arrangements linked to these options and implement the proposals.

To date three community centres have been leased on 25 year leases to community groups, whereby over a 5 year period the maintenance and running costs are transferred to the community organisation thereby reducing the Council's liabilities. In addition it allows the management committees greater freedoms to pursue external funding. Negotiations are ongoing with a further three community groups.

## **PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE WORKING**

### **5.20 Public Sector GIS based database**

Staffordshire County Council, working in conjunction with Newcastle Borough Council and the other District Authorities, has developed an intranet database which holds the land ownership details of all the Councils and other public bodies such as Police and Fire Authority etc. In addition the County Council has formalised a strategic partnering arrangement with a private sector organisation with the aim of providing

greater focus on the strategic management of its property portfolio (this was used to deliver the Castle House project). Both of these actions should provide opportunities for the Borough Council to manage its own property assets more effectively and it is expected that further information will emerge over the next twelve months in this regard.

### **5.21 Regeneration**

The Authority continues to work with various partners to bring about the regeneration of various sites throughout the Borough. From time to time such projects involve land in which the Council has an interest; in such cases the primary aim is to facilitate delivery of the scheme whilst ensuring that the Council achieves “best consideration” for disposal of its interest.

### **5.22 One Public Estate**

One Public Estate (OPE) is an established national programme delivered in partnership by the Cabinet Office Government Property Unit (GPU) and the Local Government Association (LGA). It provides practical and technical support and funding to councils to deliver ambitious property-focused programmes in collaboration with central government and other public sector partners.

The OPE Estates Programme is about getting more from our collective assets - whether that's catalysing major service transformation such as health and social care integration and benefits reform; unlocking land for new homes and commercial space; or creating new opportunities to save on running costs or generate income

The programme will provide strategic oversight across organisational boundaries to support the optimal use of the public estates including where appropriate shared services. Its aim is to support and help align asset and estates planning functions in the following thematic areas:

- Strategic Estates Planning
- Aligning Investment and Divestment
- Intelligence and Spatial Mapping

An OPE Estates Programme Board has been set up in Staffordshire; this brings together those public bodies which own land and property assets in the County. This board meets bi-monthly.

### **Newcastle Town Centre Redevelopment**

**5.23** In 2011 the Borough Council in partnership with Staffordshire County Council purchased the former Sainsbury's supermarket premises in order to assemble a site for a comprehensive regeneration scheme in

the Ryecroft area of the Town Centre. This site also includes the now vacated Civic Offices and the adjacent car parks.

- 5.24** The site was formally marketed by the Council's retained specialist retail consultants, on the basis of a disposal by way of a long term ground lease and a development partner was appointed and following detailed discussions a planning application was submitted in respect of a retail-led regeneration scheme. At the time of writing a land sale agreement was in place along with a resolution to grant planning permission.

### **Newcastle Town Centre Public Realm**

- 5.25** The County Council has delivered further targeted improvements in the town centre's pedestrianised streets including the sensitive Red Lion Square area thereby making the built environment more attractive.

### **Shared Accommodation**

- 5.26** The Authority currently shares accommodation with its public sector partners examples of which are listed below:

- Castle House is shared with Staffordshire County Council (including Library and Registrars), Staffordshire Police and Aspire Housing.
- Kidsgrove Town Hall is shared with Staffordshire County Council, and Staffordshire Police.

### **Facilitating Development of Community Assets**

- 5.27** Listed below are two examples where the Council has facilitated enhancement of important community facilities:-

- Disposing of land at Loggerheads to the SFRS to facilitate the construction of a community fire station
- Leasing the former North Staffs Adventure Playground (now known as the Brook Centre) to two community charities, Approach and Our Space.

As indicated above the Council is at an advanced stage of promoting community use of the iconic Guildhall too.

### **Funding and Investment Strategy**

- 5.28** In the current economic climate funding for Council projects has been severely restricted and in some cases stopped. Consequently this Council along with others is having to generate funding from other sources one of which is through the disposal of assets which no longer support service delivery. The capital receipts from these disposals will allow the Council to develop an investment strategy to deliver its capital programme needs (which is aligned with communities' needs and requirements).



## **CORPORATE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE REGARDING ASSET MANAGEMENT**

**6.1** The diagram at Appendix 3 shows the Council's structure in terms of Asset Management. Since January 2008 the Assets Section has been consolidated into the Regeneration and Development Directorate.

### **Portfolio Holder Responsibility**

**6.2** Asset Management predominately falls within two Cabinet portfolios:

- Planning and Regeneration
- Finance and Resources

### **Corporate Property Officer**

**6.3** The Corporate Property Officer (CPO) is the Executive Director (Regeneration and Development) (a member of the Executive Management Team).

### **Assets Review Group**

**6.4** The Assets Review Group is chaired by the Executive Director (Regeneration and Development) and meets on a bi-monthly basis. The overall objective of the Group is to be responsible for the formulation of strategies in respect of income generation relating to asset disposals.

### **Capital Programme Review Group**

**6.5** The Capital Programme Review Group (CPRG) meets as required and is chaired by the Executive Director (Resources and Support Services). This group considers and monitors capital expenditure.

**6.6** The ARG and CPRG monitor the use of both Assets and Capital, and approve the release of Assets for specific purposes, having reviewed the business case for the use. Similarly they make recommendations to the Council's Executive Management Team (EMT) about Capital expenditure, having examined the business case, and subsequently monitor the capital expenditure programme.

**6.7** The recommendations and decisions of these two groups directly inform the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme. In terms of broader governance arrangements the decisions of both groups have to be ratified by EMT (as is the case with all Corporate Working Groups).

**6.8** Membership of the Assets Review Group ensures that the CPO receives direct and pertinent user information about the Council's Operational Portfolio. The ARG effectively provides feedback as to any asset management proposals/plans being considered either corporately or from a service perspective. Any plans or proposals requiring new capital expenditure require endorsement by the CPRG before proceeding through the formal decision-making processes of Cabinet or Council.

**6.9** The output from both the ARG and the CPRG will form the basis of the Council's Capital programme (which is reviewed annually along with the Council Plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy).

- 6.10** As well as ensuring the efficient and effective use of the Council's property assets, the role of the CPO, ARG and the CPRG is to ensure a consistency between the Council's asset portfolio and the Council's Council Plan, as well as the service-specific Service and Financial Plans.

### **Day to Day Asset Management Planning**

- 6.11** The Executive Director (Regeneration & Development) is responsible for Assets, Facilities Management, Engineering and Car Parks. All the day-to-day work connected with this asset management planning is undertaken within this service area. Significant expenditure is allocated through the capital planning process whilst small scale works and reactive maintenance is funded from a Repairs and Renewals Fund.

### **ASSET MANAGEMENT DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS**

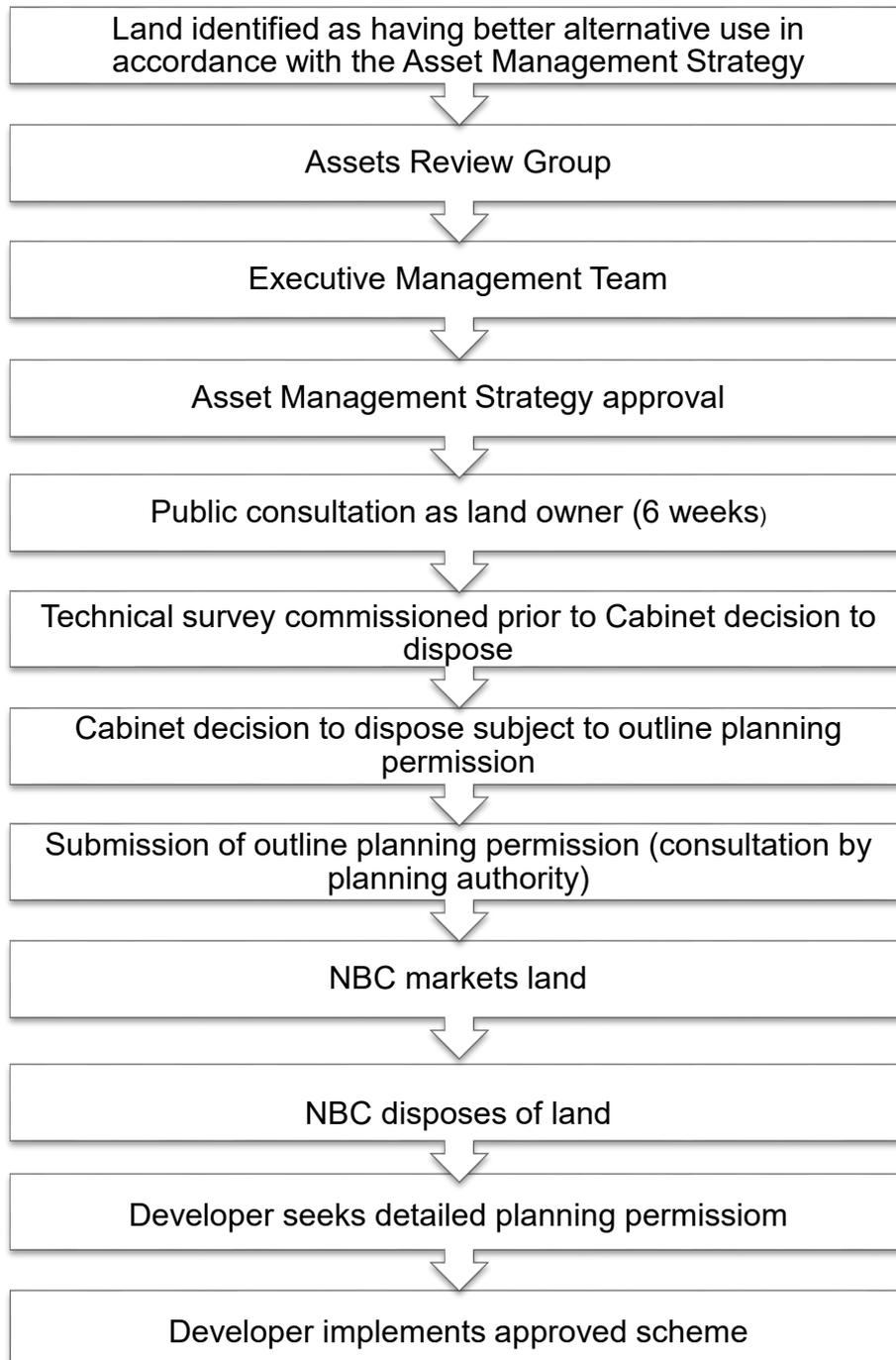
- 6.12** The Council's land ownership mapping system (terrier), property data, Asset Register and property management and maintenance records are held on one computerised system. Paper filing systems are used for other property management functions.
- 6.13** The Council subscribes to the IDOX Uniform suite of applications which includes the asset register and property management modules, which contains key property information. This system links with other modules throughout the authority, which means that departments such as Planning, Land Charges Operations and Building Control, which use plan-based systems, will be able to access shared information.
- 6.14** The system also allows for each property to be given a unique property reference and will allow this reference to be linked to the National Land and Property Gazetteer.

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- 6.15** In 2010 the Council purchased a computerised health and safety system (BS Target 100). This system along with the IDOX Uniform system are used to manage, record and monitor all aspects of health and safety across the Council including the inspection and servicing of the building utilities and any other statutory inspections. In addition the Council has retained consultants to advise on construction and project health and safety and related legislation.

## APPENDIX 1

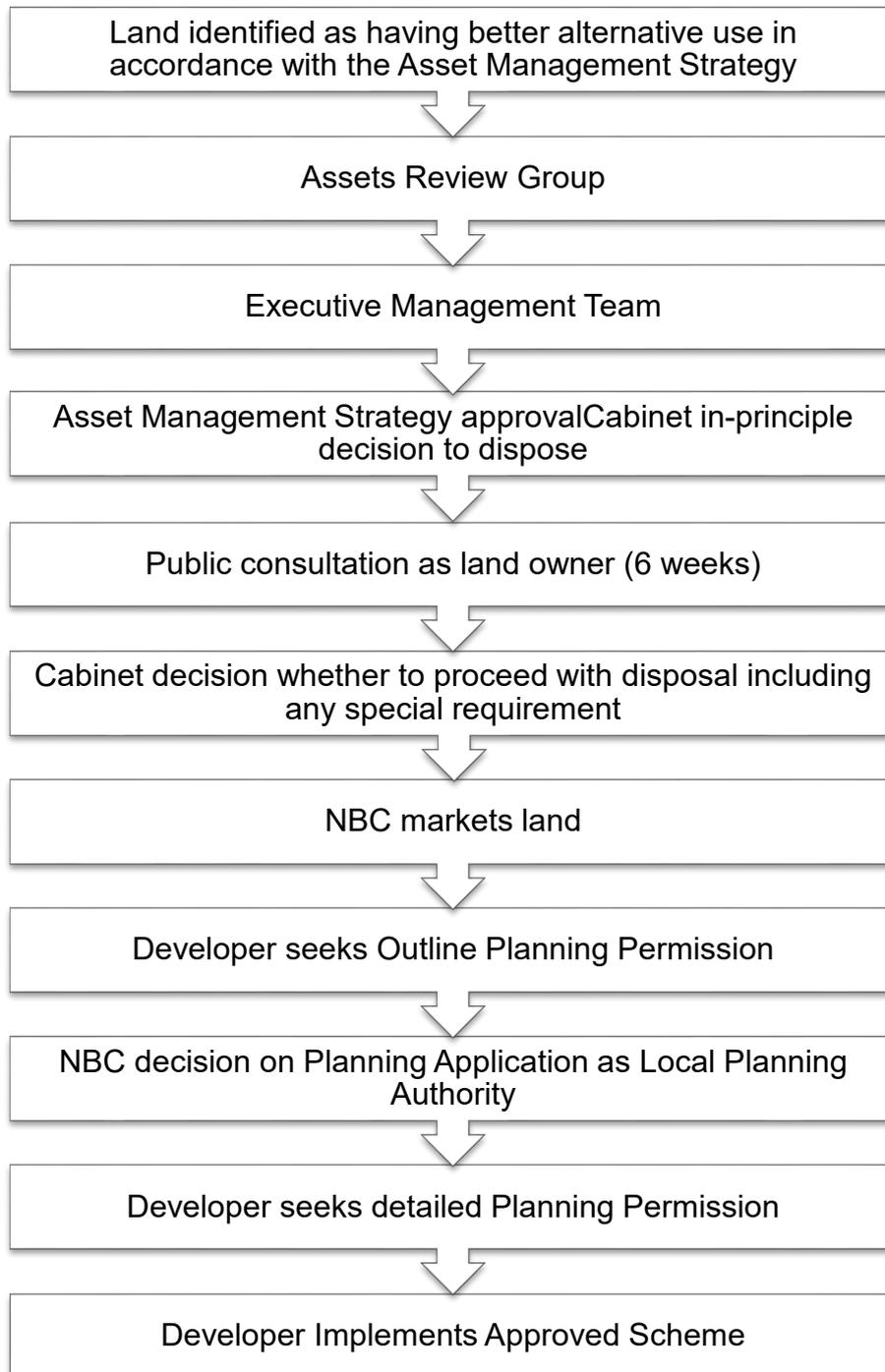
**Typical consultation approach in cases where unclear planning policy and NBC seeking planning permission prior to disposal.**



**NB. Attention is drawn to the council's proposed approach to consultation as both land owner and as local planning authority.**

## APPENDIX 2

### Typical consultation approach in cases where clear planning policy and Newcastle Borough Council NOT seeking Planning Permission prior to disposal of significant asset



**NB. Attention is drawn to the council's proposed approach to consultation as both land owner and as local planning authority.**

**APPENDIX 3**

**Newcastle-under-Lyme Council's  
Asset Management Plan Reporting Structure**

