



Finance and Resources

Portfolio Performance and Resources Mid-Year Report 2024/5



Ambitious Stockport, creating opportunities *for everyone*

Date	18 November 2024	Version	1.0 (Scrutiny)	Approved by	JJ
------	------------------	---------	----------------	-------------	----



FINANCE AND RESOURCES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present the Mid-Year Portfolio Performance and Resources Report (PPRR) for the Finance and Resources Portfolio.

It will surprise no one when I say that the financial landscape continues to pose significant challenges for councils, dealing with pressures such as rising levels of need for our support, inflation and high interest rates. Officers across council services are continuing to work hard on developing financial recovery plans to address the in-year budget pressures and bring costs in line with cash limit budgets.

Officers are still working through the implications of the new government's recent budget announcements and the impact this will have on our Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). I think it's safe to say however that the financial landscape will continue to be a challenging one for councils for the foreseeable future – and Stockport is no exception. The report summarises how our MTFP is constantly being adjusted and refined to ensure we remain able to respond to these challenges.



As we're all too aware, however, it's not just councils that are facing significant financial constraints. Though inflation has, for the moment at least, returned to more 'normal' levels, prices are still rising (albeit more slowly) and many of our residents are continuing to struggle to make ends meet. The council however is determined to do what it can to help those who are struggling most, and this report includes updates on initiatives such as the Household Support Fund (HSF), which, to date, has helped more than 20,000 households in the borough, and the free school meals scheme. If you want to know more about the council's anti-poverty work, I'd recommend you also have a look at the Communities, Culture and Sports PPRR.

Our Value for Money work programme ensures that we aim to maximise the social value we are able to gain from the contracts we award, and this is now beginning to show positive results – several care-experienced young people have benefitted from work experience, apprenticeships and paid employment opportunities.

Our Supported Internship Programme is also helping young people with special educational needs and disabilities into employment. The 'Class of 2023/24' graduated in July and the 2024/25 cohort began their programme in September.

Working with partners, we are continuing to enable more and more people to 'get online' through the DigiKnow initiative and the network of trained 'Digital Champions'. The GM One Network is now live, creating a unified digital infrastructure across public sector organisations in Greater Manchester.

Work to support and enable our workforce to develop continues, for example, through the Leading Stockport programme. Its most recent focus has been on equipping our managers to lead in an inclusive way. As if we needed reminding, the far-right activity we saw on our streets in the late summer only served to underline the importance of that work. During this period, a significant number of our staff reported feeling threatened or vulnerable, and we sought to reassure and support them in a range of ways.

As you'll see, the report also highlights recent issues the council has had with answering phone calls to our Contact Centre in a timely manner, as well as with dealing with complaints within prescribed timescales. The report explains the reasons behind these issues, and measures have been identified to address them. We are therefore confident that we will have a more positive story to tell at year-end.

Councillor Jilly Julian,
Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Revenue Budget (Forecast)		Capital Programme	
	£000		£000
Cash Limit	32,395	2024/25 Capital Budget	29,930
Outturn	33,244	2025/26 Capital Budget	26,926
(Surplus)/Deficit	849	2026/27 Capital Budget	3,136
<u>Reserves</u> Approved use of reserves balance aligned to the portfolio is £1.082m; the forecast outturn above includes a drawdown of £0.853m plus £2.679m net from reserve allocations reported in other portfolios and corporately.		2027/28 Capital Budget	2,571
		2028/29 Capital Budget	3,366

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

1. DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES



This report is based on the **2024/25 Portfolio Agreement**, considered by the Corporate, Resource Management and Governance Scrutiny (CRMG) Committee on 11th June 2024 and approved by Cabinet on 25th June 2023. The link to the Agreement can be found by clicking [here](#).







This Quarter 2 (Mid-Year) report includes updates on all **delivery projects, programmes and other initiatives** set out in the portfolio agreement, up to the end of September 2023 where this is available.

Data is reported for all **performance measures** included in the agreement that have been updated since the publication of the 2024/25 Annual Reports. These are categorised to reflect the council's influence and responsibility as Council, Partnership or Contextual. These categories are used to determine the type of target used as numerical, comparator, direction of travel or if no target is set. Definitions for these categories and target types are included within the Agreement.

The updated Portfolio Performance Dashboards are published alongside these reports and these can be [found here](#). They contain the latest data across the full set of portfolio measures, including historical trends and comparative data (where available).

The criteria for RAG ratings and direction of travel status are shown below. The rationale for any variations to this will be clearly highlighted within the commentary.

Key to symbols used in tables

	Red – indicator is performing significantly (>5%) below target.		Getting worse – the year-end position (forecast or actual) for this indicator is less favourable than the previous year-end.
	Amber – indicator is performing slightly (<5%) below target.		Stable – the year-end position (forecast or actual) for this indicator is within 1% either side of the previous year-end.
	Green – indicator is on track or performing above target.		Getting better – the year-end position (forecast or actual) for this indicator is more favourable than the previous year-end.
GMS – measure is included in the Greater Manchester Strategy outcomes framework.			

Priority 1: Delivering financial robustness and resilience and strong governance

Progress with each of the delivery projects aligned to this priority in the 2024/25 Portfolio Agreement is summarised below.

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) - Effectively allocating and prioritising our resources and delivering a three-year savings programme and recovery plans

The financial landscape continues to pose significant financial challenges for councils dealing with the cost of increasing need for support from residents and businesses, inflationary costs and high interest rates. During the September governance cycle, the council reported an in-year forecast outturn deficit of £2.637m at Quarter 1 to CRMG and Cabinet. The Quarter 2 position (also included on this agenda) has increased with a forecast outturn deficit of £3.718m with a significant increase in the need for support linked to Children's social care residential placements and Children's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments increasing Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport costs.

Officers continue to work on service financial recovery plans to address the in-year budget pressures and bring costs in line with cash limit budgets. These recovery plans are achieving in-year cost avoidance. However, the growing need for support and inflationary costs result in a challenging in-year financial position despite this work. This is particularly evident in relation to Children's Social Care where the increasing need for support and the complexity of that need is outstripping the cost avoidance being achieved resulting in a significant pressure both in-year and recurrently on the MTFP.

Corporate measures continue to be in place to ensure robust financial management principles underpin the delivery of efficient and effective services across the council to address the deficit position and mitigate the recurrent impact on the council's MTFP.

MTFP Update and Cabinet Response reports were presented to the Cabinet meeting on 18 September. Following the retesting of the underpinning MTFP assumptions and forecasts, the council's 2025/26 saving requirement is £24.517m (£26.438m approved in February) rising to £61.898m in 2028/29. Finance Officers will continue to retest the assumptions and forecasts informed by national and local announcements as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process.

The Cabinet Response report sets out the Cabinet's proposals regarding balancing the 2025/26 budget and medium-term financial position. This will include further corporate adjustments to assumptions and forecasts, Cabinet change proposals, local taxation and use of one-off resources recognising the need for difficult decisions and the impact on residents and businesses. There are several national announcements that will inform the medium-term financial position including:

- Announcement of the September inflation rate on 16 October used to inform the Local Government Finance Settlement. the inflation rate for September was confirmed as 1.7%.
- Announcement of the Real Living Wage (RLW) increase from 1 April 2025 on 23 October. The Real Living Wage announcement will increase by 60p from 1 April 2025 from £12.00 to £12.60.
- Government's national budget announcement on 30 October included detail on the 2025/26 Department Expenditure Limits as the first year of a three-year Government spending review to be completed in Spring 2025. Given the amount of detail in the Budget documents released, Officers are working through the detail to fully assess the impact of the announcements made on the council's MTFP.

- Employers and trades unions reached agreement on the 2024/25 pay award in October 2024.
- Local Government Finance Settlement Policy Settlement expected in mid-November.
- Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement expected in mid-December.

Reports are being presented to Scrutiny Committees in the current governance cycle. These include details of the Cabinet's change proposals and the required engagement and consultation process.

Implementing our ambitious Capital and Treasury Management Strategies

The Treasury Management Strategy, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision 2023/24 annual report and 2024/25 Quarter 1 report were presented to and approved by CRMG and Cabinet in September. Both reports demonstrate the council's compliance with relevant legislation and regulations and the strong performance of the Treasury Management function despite the national economic challenges faced over the period. Further reports will be presented during the year.

Reserves Policy

The council's 2024/25 Reserves Policy was presented to and approved by CRMG and Cabinet in September following annual review. The Reserves Policy ensures resources held in earmarked reserves are aligned to the council's ambition and priorities, meet statutory requirements, mitigate risk and support the robustness and resilience of the council's medium-term financial plan.

Productivity Plans

The productivity plan for Stockport Council was submitted to the Department for Levelling Up on 19 July 2024, it is also published on the council website on the transparency pages.

In mid-September the council received a letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution. This letter thanked councils for their input into the productivity plans and set out plans regarding how the productivity plans will be used. This includes a commitment to host a series of roundtable sessions with the sector and experts to consider the lessons learned from the plans, the barriers identified and how these are overcome together. Dates for the roundtable sessions have yet to be set.

Measuring Performance and Reporting Progress

Performance data on measures relating to this priority updated since publication of the 2023/24 Annual Reports is summarised in the table below. Commentary on any measures that have a 'Red' RAG rating, as well as those rated 'Amber' with a deteriorating trend, is set out beneath the table.

Indicator Name	Good Perf.	2yr Prev. (YE)	Prev. Year End	Values	Forecast	Target		
F&R 1.1: Operational property costs (£/sqm)	Low (Council)	13.34 £/m2	11.23 £/m2	11.41 £/m2 (30/09/2024)	11.41 £/m2	Maintain	A	↓
F&R 1.2: Property occupancy/ownership costs (£/sqm)	Low (Council)	53.5 £/m2	55.04 £/m2	54.98 £/m2 (30/09/2024)	54.98 £/m2	Maintain	G	→
F&R 1.3: Annual energy consumption (KWH/sqm)	Low (Council)	79.91 kWh/m2	79.4 kWh/m2	78.82 kWh/m2 (30/09/2024)	78.82 kWh/m2	Minimise	G	→
F&R 1.4: % Council Tax collected	High (Council)	97.47 %	97.48 %	52.75 % (30/09/2024)	97 %	97 %	G	→
F&R 1.5: % Business Rates collected	High (Council)	96.48 %	97 %	56.49 % (30/09/2024)	96 %	96 %	G	↓

Commentary on performance

F&R1.1 (Operational property costs)

The council is continuing to work hard on keeping costs contained within the portfolio. Upward inflationary pressures on building works and general property costs are continuing, however. An expansion of direct delivery of works following the addition of our maintenance operatives is being explored. The move to a brokered utility solution has proved to be a success and has contained the costs. Procurement of an extension to the contract is currently being undertaken.

Priority 2: Responsiveness to customers and residents

Delivering good quality and responsive customer experience for all residents is a key priority. It is core to the delivery of the Council Plan's ambition for efficient and effective services and ensures that the Council lives its values and puts people at the heart of everything it does.

Progress with each of the delivery projects aligned to this priority in the 2024/25 Portfolio Agreement is summarised below.

Resident Experience

A new Customer Experience Group is in the process of being set up to help embed and instil a more customer-friendly culture. The 'Contact Us' page of the website has been reviewed, ensuring only key numbers are listed, whilst still promoting 'digital first' where possible.

The Resident Service created a handbook detailing expectations of service engagement with residents and support for residents. Libraries have a key role to play in supporting residents, ensuring staff are empowered to find answers for residents themselves. The Resident Service approach has been enhanced with training from Public Health colleagues on the 'Make Every Contact Count' approach with residents. Training took place during the Library Service's Away Day.

Contact Centre

The Contact Centre is now located on the second floor of Stopford House. A review of all Contact Centre processes has been completed and best practice implemented around scheduling, point of contact and performance management. These improvements have freed up an additional 22 hours per week that call handlers are available for calls.

While call volumes have increased by 10% compared to the same period last year, performance has improved significantly month-on-month since April. Average waiting time reduced from 10min 52 sec (April) to 3 mins 38 secs in September and the call abandonment rate reduced from 32.4% in April to 15.3% in September.

The production of a dashboard has been superseded by the creation of detailed performance reports which have now been set up within the Netcall system.

Complaints

Joint working between the Complaints Team and service managers across the council continues to be a focus. Following a review of processes in 2023/24 Quarter 4, a robust action plan is now in place to drive improvements. In 2024/25 Quarter 3, a new online flow for reporting an issue will be implemented, allowing residents to report something without it being a complaint and colleagues will be able to attend a briefing session on changes. The quality scorecard implemented in Quarter 4 provides data to target specific areas where improvements can be made and the council continues to use this tool. Data will be shared with directorates through quarterly senior management team reporting.

In 2024/25 the complaint measures changed to include **all** corporate complaints data (previously it only included Place and CSS). While Place and CSS continue to perform well, with low late response rates, the overall performance data highlights the pressure relating to Children's Corporate complaints, particularly connected with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

Procurement - ensuring that every penny we spend benefits the people of Stockport

The council's Value for Money work programme ensures that the social value gained from the contracts it awards is relevant to Stockport's needs. The engagement toolkit, which highlights priority cohorts and needs (and directs suppliers to on-line social value brokerage platform) is now issued with the 'opportunity to tender' procurement information. Positive results are beginning to be seen, and many community groups have already benefited from this. Also through this process, a number of care-experienced children have already benefitted from work experience, apprenticeships and paid employment opportunities.

To boost take-up from suppliers, and potential suppliers, the Match My Project portal was showcased at a recent 'Meet the Buyer' market engagement event, with a number of suppliers signing up. A page has also been added to the council's website that explains how community groups can benefit ([Community funding - Stockport Council](#)).

Commissioning and income generation

The first six months of the NHS/Stepping Hill commission was completed with over 150 patients assisted and discharged in a timely manner and over 300 'bed days' saved. Patients are assisted with benefit, debt and housing matters and the Welfare Rights Support Team work closely with partner agencies to resolve practical and financial issues for patients. The service has been recommissioned for the remainder of the financial year.

The council's Debt Advice Tam has again secured funding from Stockport Homes Group for 2024/25 to provide its tenants with a specialist debt advice service.

The council's specialist Welfare Rights mental health services, provided to patients under community mental health teams at Baker Street and Councillor Lane, are currently under review with a view to the NHS and Adult Social Care both contributing to costs.

Household Support Fund

Household Support Fund Phase 5 was successfully delivered. From 1 April to 30 September 2024:

- An estimated 20,224 households were supported with an estimated 36,999 items of support.
- £1,714m was awarded to households with children (83.7% of total spend).
- £0.403m was distributed by third-party organisations (19.7% of total spend).

The UK Government has announced a further extension to the Household Support Fund for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025. Stockport's allocation is £2.163m. Progress for this period will be reported in the Year-End Portfolio Performance and Resources Report.

Free School Meals Extension Project School Meal Support Scheme

The scheme was successfully delivered with around 1,300 pupils benefitting from the scheme during the 2023/24 academic year (the scheme ended in July 2024). To ensure recipients continued to receive support following the end of the Free School Meals Extension Project, 247 children (184 families) who would not usually have been eligible to receive Family Support Vouchers (FSVs) were included in the FSV distribution in July 2024. They will also be included in the in the next round of vouchers to be distributed in December 2024.

Ensuring that our decision-making and governance arrangements preserve our commitments to transparency, integrity, fairness and taking care of our residents.

The following member training sessions took place during Quarter 2:

10 July – Brookfield Park Shiers Family Trust Briefing
15 July – Internal Audit and Risk Management
16 July – Climate Action Now
23 July – Planning Q&A
24 July – Fair and Inclusive (Equality and Anti-Poverty)
25 July – Employment Appeals
5 August – Information Management, Data Protection and Cyber Security
12 August – All Member Briefing: Match My Project
19 August – Speech Writing and Public Speaking
21 August – Casework Management and Advocacy Skills
11 September – Audit Committee – Risk Training Session

Throughout the year, training for officers is provided on governance, decision-making, report-writing and political awareness.

The council's constitution was reviewed by the Monitoring Officer during Quarter 2 and updated by agreement at the council meeting on 1 October 2024 following discussion with the Constitution Working Party, Scrutiny and Cabinet. The amendments mainly reflected the changes to the officer scheme of delegation.

Council committee meetings continue to be webcast, and had only a limited number of appendices to reports that were marked 'confidential'.

Measuring Performance and Reporting Progress

Performance data on measures relating to this priority updated since publication of the 2023/24 Annual Reports is summarised in below. Commentary on any measures that have a 'Red' RAG rating, as well as those rated 'Amber' with a deteriorating trend, is set out beneath the table.

Indicator Name	Good Perf.	2yr Prev. (YE)	Prev. Year End	Values	Forecast	Target		
F&R 2.1: Average time taken to process new Housing Benefit claims and changes (days)	Low (Council)	5.6 days	5.4 days	8.1 days (30/09/2024)	7 days	7 days	G	↓
F&R 2.2: % invoices paid in 30 days	High (Council)	89.72 %	90.6 %	90.93 % (30/09/2024) 16099 / 17704	90.93 %	95 %	A	→
F&R 2.3: % invoices paid to local suppliers in 10 days	High (Council)	76.02 %	77.1 %	80.15 % (30/09/2024) 4844 / 6044		80 %	G	↑
F&R 2.4i: Social Value: Controllable Local Spend	High (Council)	55.3 %	57 %	62.9 % (30/09/2024)		Maximise	G	↑
F&R 2.4ii: % Social value committed / unlocked as recorded on the Social Value portal	High (Council)			43.52 (30/06/2024) 552988 / 1270614		Maximise	N/A	○
F&R 2.5: Average time taken to answer phone calls to the Contact Centre	Low (Council)		192 seconds	480 seconds (30/09/2024) 24386574 / 50839	354 seconds	180 seconds	R	↓
F&R 2.6: % of calls that are abandoned	Low (Council)		14.9 %	28.4 % (30/09/2024) 28047 / 98665	20 %	14 %	R	↓
F&R 2.7: % of callers to the Contact Centre who are satisfied with their telephone call	High (Council)			91.26 % (30/09/2024) 3987 / 4369	90 %	Maximise	N/A	○
F&R 2.8: Stage 1 complaints responded to on time (% and number).	High (Council)	76.32 %	81.35 %	58.92 % (30/09/2024) 142 / 241	70 %	82 %	R	↓
F&R 2.9: Stage 2 complaints responded to on time (% and number).	High (Council)	87.14 %	86.42 %	70.49 % (30/09/2024) 43 / 61	80 %	86 %	R	↓
F&R 2.10: FOI Response Time	High (Council)	88.1 %	90.9 %	80.68 % (30/09/2024) 664 / 823	80.7 %	95 %	R	↓

Commentary on performance

F&R 2.5 (Average time taken to answer calls to the Contact Centre)

Cumulatively, quarterly performance figures and end-of-year targets do not fully reflect the significant month-on-month improvement in performance reported above. This is due to poor performance in Quarter 1 skewing the average for the year. This performance was a result of a number of key posts being vacant. Greater resilience has been built in moving forward and there is confidence that the percentage targets will be achieved in Quarters 3 and 4.

F&R 2.6 (% of calls to the Contact Centre that are abandoned)

As explained above, cumulatively, quarterly performance figures and end-of-year targets do not fully reflect the significant month-on-month improvement in performance reported above. This is due to poor performance in Quarter 1 skewing the average for the year. Again, however, there is confidence that the targets will be met in Quarters 3 and 4 - September abandonment rate is 15.3%.

F&R 2.8 (Stage 1 complaints responded to on time) and F&R 2.9 (Stage 2 complaints responded to on time)

Complaints data now includes Children's corporate complaints (having included only CSS and Place complaints in previous years).

Performance has been affected by the significant increase in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) complaints and the overwhelming pressure on the SEND service dealing with an unprecedented number of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) referrals, affecting their ability to provide responses within complaints timescales. This is part of a wider national picture and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman confirmed earlier this year that 26% of their investigation casework relates to SEND.

F&R 2.10 (FOI response time)

Performance in relation to Freedom of Information (FOI) request responses remains challenging due to the increasing complexity of requests and the resulting demands on services for timely responses. A new policy introduced this year has incorporated an approval step into the FOI process, granting senior leaders' direct oversight of their service's responses. While this addition has extended the process time, it has also enhanced the quality of the information being released. Efforts are underway to explore digital solutions that could potentially reduce the administrative workload on the FOI team and services.

Priority 3: Supporting our workforce

The council's committed efforts to enhance the colleague experience at every stage of their journey have been recognised nationally as Stockport Council was awarded the best HR and OD Team and the best Diversity and Inclusion Programme at the Public Sector People Managers Association (PPMA) awards, along with being highly commended in three other categories in April 2024. This acknowledgement highlights the council's dedication to creating a supporting and enriching work environment, showcasing the significant impact of its initiatives on a larger scale.

The council will support its workforce by delivering against the five priorities within the One Team People Plan, set out below.

Join Us

The latest jobs fair, held in the Town Hall Ballroom on 17 September, continued the success of previous events. Approximately 50 stall holders, advertising vacancies both within the council and in its partners, saw 720 visitors attend throughout the day – both record numbers for our Jobs Fairs.

The council's Supported Interns Class of 2023/24 graduated at a ceremony held at Stockport Interchange on 11 July. The event was attended by the interns, their families and representatives from employers and partners, and was a great celebration of their achievements and journey on the programme.

The Supported Intern Class of 2024/25 started their programme in September.

Grow and Thrive

The Leading Stockport programme continues to grow, with a recent focus on equipping managers and leaders to lead in an inclusive way. Whilst this work was underway before the events of the summer, those events and the impact on colleagues have further emphasised the importance of this programme.

The July Leadership Forum, attended by over 400 of the organisation's leaders and managers, was led by Safina Nadeem from Purple Infusion. The event included a panel discussion of colleagues talking about their experiences of inclusion as Stockport Council employees.

Since then, 'Inclusive Leadership' masterclasses have been launched. These half-day sessions are giving colleagues the opportunity to explore the subject in more detail. Over 260 managers have booked on so far, with the expectation that all the organisation's leaders and managers complete the course by spring 2025.

Feel Supported

The Wellbeing Champions Network continues to grow, as does the internal pool of coaches. The network has recently been recognised in a number of awards, including being highly commended for 'Best Health & Wellbeing Initiative' at the Public Services People Managers Association awards in April and being shortlisted for 'Best Wellbeing Innovation' at the Local Government Chronicle Awards in November.

Belong Here

The racism and Islamophobia experienced nationwide during the summer emphasised the importance of the Belong Here pillar. During this period, responding to feedback from colleagues, check-in sessions were held in each directorate to reiterate the council's support to colleagues and to understand what more the council could do to mitigate the concerns and worries they held.

As a result of these check-in sessions, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan has been thoroughly refreshed to:

- Increase the visibility of ongoing work in this area – an update is now provided in All Colleague newsletters on the council's EDI work and the steps it is taking to be a more inclusive workplace.
- Ensure the council is better prepared should any similar tensions take place in the future, learning from colleagues feedback on our communications over the summer.

Live Our Values

Work in this pillar continues through the colleague engagement approach, including the All Colleague Briefings led the Chief Executive and supported by the Leader of the Council. At the last briefings, held both online and in person in the Town Hall Ballroom, colleagues heard updates on work around EDI, Fostering, Neighbourhoods & Prevention and Artificial Intelligence.

Measuring Performance and Reporting Progress

Performance data on measures relating to this priority that have been updated since publication of the 2023/24 Annual Reports is summarised in the table below.

Indicator Name	Good Perf.	2yr Prev. (YE)	Prev. Year End	Values	Forecast	Target		
F&R 3.5: Average working days lost due to sickness absence per employee	Low (Council)	9.86 days	8.67 days	10.06 days (30/09/2024)	9.5 days	9.5 days	G	↓
F&R 3.6: Staff turnover	Low (contextual)	14.97	9.97	8.93 (30/09/2024)	9.5	N/A	N/A	↑

Priority 4: Radically Digital Stockport

Progress with each of the delivery projects aligned to this priority in the 2024/25 Portfolio Agreement is summarised below.

Continuing our journey to be a radically Digital Council

As part of the neighbourhood and prevention programme, the council has been working to ensure it has data and intelligence available at a neighbourhood level. This includes incorporating a number of key data sets within neighbourhood profiles, for example, demographic information, physical assets, deprivation and anti-poverty data. This information is currently aligned to the seven neighbourhoods and a further update to the profiles to include ward-level drill-down functionality is being developed.

The council has also created specific profiles which sit under the wider neighbourhood profiles that are aimed at colleagues collaborating on specific thematic areas, including health profiles to support Area Leadership Teams, and children and young people profiles to support Family Hubs. These include additional operational information to support colleagues.

September saw the first meeting of the council's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Development Group, this group brings together change agents from across the council to explore and test AI opportunities in their service. The group is set to test 'Copilot', Microsoft's AI assistant that can improve service productivity and support colleagues with tasks that were previously manual and labour intensive. More information on Copilot and the opportunities it brings in will be shared in the year-end Portfolio Performance and Resources Report

Other opportunities of AI are being explored. These include how it can support homelessness prevention and how it can support Social Care colleagues with writing up assessments.

Supporting digital communities

This quarter's focus was on improving information, advice and guidance. The new [One Stockport Local online directory](#) brings together local support and things to do in the community to make it easier for people to help themselves, their families and those they care for. There are different sub-categories that together build a single One Stockport Local directory:

- Children and Families directory - [Children and Families directory - Stockport Council.](#)
- SEND directory - [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) directory - Stockport Council.](#)
- Adults directory - [Support for adults - Stockport Council.](#)
- Communities - [Communities directory - Stockport Council.](#)
- Health and Wellbeing - [Health and Wellbeing directory - Stockport Council.](#)
- Financial Support - [Financial Support - Stockport Council.](#)

Individual directories can be accessed through improved user journeys on our [Family Hubs](#), [SEND Local Offer](#), [Support for Adults](#) and [Communities](#) webpages.

The roadmap of improvements to the [council's website](#) is still being developed, with many of the secondary pages and areas of the website now being improved following changes already made to the homepage. Work is also underway to develop the new website for Stockroom which is expected to go live in January 2025.

During October, DigiKnow partners marked 'Digitober' the fifth annual celebration of Greater Manchester's digital achievements. Partners worked closely with other networks and alliances to run a range of events to support access to digital support, training, devices and information. This included further sessions with NHS partners to promote and encourage digital take-up of the NHS app with Starting Point and Viaduct – better liaison with Primary Care Network representatives across Stockport.

Digitober also coincided with Poverty Action Week. Work was undertaken with GM-Digital leads on digital switchover and developments with Anti-Poverty to promote take up of Social Tariffs and the use of National Databank across Stockport. This included an event in October following Challenge Poverty Week, with Family Hubs which gave low-income families an opportunity to purchase a low-cost device and find out more about digital inclusion options.

Across DigiKnow Alliance partners, sharing information and inclusion has been paramount with digital improvements and mapping. A network event took place in September 2024. There are now more than 90 Digital Alliance partners, from the corporate, private, charitable and voluntary sectors. Some of the partners have taken the opportunity to use or rent the commercial space in 'The Innovation Centre' and STOK, new developments in Stockport Town Centre.





Planning for the future so that Stockport is a Digital Place

The GM One Network is now live. The network, built upon the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN), creates a unified digital infrastructure across public sector organisations in Greater Manchester. Stockport and partners have collaborated to lay 2,700km of dark fibre right across the whole region, connecting 1,600 sites.

A deep-dive into Digital Place initiatives for Town Centre West Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) was undertaken to explore opportunities to leverage the benefits the GM One Network brings us. This process has helped identify priorities such as electric vehicle charging, energy analytics, smart parking management and Wi-Fi. The council will be exploring how best to progress these in the coming quarter.

Measuring Performance and Reporting Progress

Performance data on measures relating to this priority that have been updated since publication of the 2023/24 Annual Reports is summarised in the table below.

Indicator Name	Good Perf.	2yr Prev. (YE)	Prev. Year End	Values	Forecast	Target		
F&R 4.1: DigiKnow - cumulative number of individuals (all time)	High (Council)	15263 people	17691 people	15,769 people (30/09/2024)	70000 people	55364 people		
F&R 4.2: Cumulative Number of digital volunteers (Digital Champions, DigiKnow Friends, DigiKnow Corporate Ambassadors)	High (Council)	281 volunteers	400 volunteers	442 volunteers (30/09/2024)	475 volunteers	350 volunteers		

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

2. FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND MONITORING



2.1 Revenue – Cash limit

Budget at Q2:

	Previously Reported (Q1) £000	Increase (Reduction) £000	Budget at Q2 £000
Cash Limit Budget	32,395	0	32,395

Budget Changes since previously reported at Quarter 1

No changes have been made to the portfolio's cash limit since the previous Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring Update report to CRMG on 3 September 2024 and remains at £32.395m.

Forecast:

Net Cash Limit Budget	Net Expenditure	Covid-19 Scarring Allocation	Net Appropriations (from) Reserves	Outturn (Surplus) / Deficit Q4
£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
32,395	41,759	(4,983)	(3,532)	849

The Quarter 2 forecast position for the Finance and Resources portfolio is a deficit of £0.849m, a reduction of £0.139m from Quarter 1, and represents 2.6% of the cash limit budget. This is after the funding of £3.532m of expenditure from earmarked reserves and, in the case of the Investment and Development Account (I&D), £4.983m Covid-19 scarring contingency.

The reduction largely reflects the introduction of additional vacancy management and recruitment controls for all the services as part of a *One Budget Approach* to address an overall cash limit pressure across the portfolios, and the overall council budget position.

The main service area driving the portfolio deficit is Legal Services, whose deficit remains forecasted to be in the order of £0.800m and stemming mainly from the Social Care team whose caseload includes both child and adult briefs.

Cost pressures also remain in the Single Property Budget (SPB) in Estates and Asset Management (EAM), due to repairs and maintenance pressures across the estate.

The Investment and Development (I&D) account is forecast to require £7.577m from the financial scarring contingency and Income and Risk Mitigation reserve at year-end to achieve a balanced position.

2.2 Earmarked Reserves

Most earmarked reserves are held at a corporate level and services produce a business case to draw down funds, which is approved through Corporate Leadership Team and Members. This strategic approach is designed to provide financial resilience for the council and to ensure that council reserves are used on an invest-to-save basis and to support council priorities. The exceptions to this are ringfenced reserves and the Directorate Flexibility Reserve.

The table below reflects planned use of reserves at Quarter 2 and is after the review of the council's reserve policy which was presented to Cabinet on 18 September 2024 (Agenda item 11)

[Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 18th September 2024, 6.00 pm - Stockport Council](#)

Reserve Category	Reserve Narration	To be used for	Approved Earmarked Balance £000	Forecast Use 2024/25 £000	Forecast Year-end Balance £000
Corporate	Revenue Grant	Finance Apprentices	216	74	142
Corporate	Legislative & Statutory	Elections (Conducting of)	0	50	(50)
Corporate	Revenue Grant	Ringfenced Intern Programme Funding	30	5	25
Directorate	Flexibility	Sundry Debtors / Debt Management	49	29	20
Directorate	Flexibility	Social Value Brokerage online portal	15	7	8
Directorate	Flexibility	Information Governance Records Management	66	66	0
Directorate	Flexibility	Staff Surveys	21	0	21
Strategic Priority	Contain Outbreak Management	Investment Plan Post-Covid	305	305	0
Strategic Priority	Cabinet Positive Investments	Armed Forces Engagement and Development	69	11	58
Linked To Budget	Transform –Invest to Save	Contracts & Commissioning – VfM Management Capacity	67	62	5
Linked To Budget	Transform – Invest to Save	Legal Services Time Recording	24	24	0
Linked To Budget	Workforce Investment/Change	One Team People Plan (HR/POD)	105	105	0
Linked To Budget	Workforce Investment/Change	ASC Business Intelligence Service Cover (Strategy)	39	39	0
Linked To Budget	Workforce Investment/Change	ASC Transformation and MTFP Project Manager (Strategy)	65	65	0
Linked To Budget	Workforce Investment/Change	One Team People Plan Implementation (Strategy)	11	11	0
		Total	1,082	853	229

Approved use of the Reserves balance is £1.082m and forecast draw down from them is £0.853m, all of which is funding revenue expenditure in this portfolio

The portfolio is also forecast to draw down £2.679m from reserve balances held corporately and in other portfolios. Of this, £2.594m will be from the corporately held Income and Interest Rate Mitigation Reserve to part support the I & D Account.

2.3 Portfolio Savings Programme

MTFP Transformational Lens	Savings Programme	Value £000	RAG Rating
Robust Corporate Governance	Service Redesign	200	Green
Robust Corporate Governance	Increase Income	50	Green
Robust Corporate Governance	Service Efficiencies in Corporate & Support Services	110	Green
Radically Digital	Digital Enabled Savings	60	Green
	Total	420	

The savings programme stemmed from the agreed Council Budget, passed at the Budget Council Meeting on 22 February 2024 [2024/25 CABINET REVENUE BUDGET](#). Notwithstanding the other pressures affecting the portfolio's finances, early steps were put in place to deliver the savings fully.

Risk rating

Green – good confidence (90% plus) the saving is/will be delivered or minor variances (<£0.050m) that will be contained within the portfolio.

Amber – progressing at a reasonable pace, action plan being pursued, may be some slippage across years and/or the final position may also be a little unclear.

Red – Significant issues arising, or further detailed consultation required which may be complex/contentious.

2.4 Capital Finance Update and Outlook

Programme

Expenditure as at 30 Sep 2024 £000	Scheme	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000
	Non Education Capital Schemes					
1,336	Asset Management Plan	4,701	2,521	2,521	2,571	3,366
1,100	TLC Fleet Vehicle Loan Facility	3,179	2,635	527	0	0
40	Children's Homes - External Placements	854	0	0	0	0
1,003	Leisure CIC - Loan Facility	1,964	0	0	0	0
52	Adswood Depot Redevelopment	2,500	4,113	88	0	0
5	Mount Tabor Refurbishment	250	0	0	0	0
0	LAN and Wi-Fi System Replacement	400	500	0	0	0
3,536	Sub-total	13,848	9,769	3,136	2,571	3,366
	Education - Schools Capital Programme					
221	Early Years	659	0	0	0	0
1,992	Primary Sector	2,199	5,166	0	0	0
3,131	Secondary Sector	7,516	950	0	0	0
2,600	Special Sector	4,617	951	0	0	0
0	Other Schemes	3	51	0	0	0
0	Funding to be allocated	48	10,039	0	0	0
703	Individual School Schemes	1,040	0	0	0	0
8,646	Sub-total	16,082	17,157	0	0	0
12,182	TOTAL	29,930	26,926	3,136	2,571	3,366

* This relates to expenditure on SAP and accruals for goods received or work performed up to the period end.

Resources

Resources	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000
Capital Grants	13,090	16,361	0	0	0
Directly Funded Borrowing	8,565	6,748	615	0	0
Unsupported Borrowing	7,365	2,821	2,521	2,571	3,366
Capital Receipts	97	488	0	0	0
External Contributions	256	496	0	0	0
Commutated Sums	121	0	0	0	0
Revenue Contributions (RCCO)	436	12	0	0	0
TOTAL	29,930	26,926	3,136	2,571	3,366

Programme Amendments – Rephasing

Scheme	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000	Funding Source	Reason
<u>Non-Education Schemes</u>							
TLC Fleet Vehicle Loan Facility	3,179	2,635	527	0	0	DFB	Scheme increase
Adswood Depot Redevelopment	(467)	467	0	0	0	DFB	Scheme rephasing
Mount Tabor Refurbishment	153	0	0	0	0	External Contributions	New scheme
Mount Tabor Refurbishment	97	0	0	0	0	Capital Receipts	New scheme
LAN and Wi-Fi System Replacement	0	488	0	0	0	External Contributions	New scheme
LAN and Wi-Fi System Replacement	400	12	0	0	0	RCCO	New scheme
<u>Education Schemes</u>							
Primary	(45)	45	0	0	0	Various	Rephase
Special	(300)	300	0	0	0	Various	Rephase
Other Schemes (Solar)	(51)	51	0	0	0	Various	Rephase
Funding to be allocated (grant bals)	1,647	(1,647)	0	0	0	Various	Rephase
Primary	6	0	0	0	0	Various	Virement
Secondary	1,374	0	0	0	0	Various	Virement
Special	266	0	0	0	0	Various	Virement
Funding to be allocated (grant bals)	(1,647)	0	0	0	0	Various	Virement
Ind Schools	48	0	0	0	0	DFB - P.Green	School DFB
TOTAL	4,660	2,351	527	0	0		

Progress against individual schemes

Scheme	Description
Asset Management Plan (AMP)	<p>A programme of work is being undertaken which is aimed at ensuring that the council's asset base is fit for purpose and in alignment with the council's strategic objectives and service delivery needs. It includes Health & Safety, roof and fabrics, Civic Complex works, Office Rationalisation and Energy and Carbon Reduction schemes.</p> <p>During 2024/25, further significant investment is ongoing, including redevelopment and refurbishment works at Hollins House, linked to the Marple Community Hub Project, to optimise this asset and allow Greater Manchester Police to relocate its services into this building.</p> <p>Three schemes are planned as part of the Project Landmark programme, which sees TLC services being relocated from Bird Hall Lane to Bruntwood Park, Enterprise House and Hollywood Park, with works to the latter project approaching completion and works to the first two projects about to commence on site.</p> <p>Further investment is planned in the Leisure estate to deal with ongoing maintenance issues, as well as supporting operational cost reduction. This pipeline of work is being developed alongside the Life Leisure CIC.</p> <p>Major works are planned at Bramall Hall, thanks to Arts Council Museum Estate and Development (MEND) funding, allowing for comprehensive roof refurbishment works to take place, with tendering currently ongoing and works due to start on site in the new year.</p>
Totally Local Company (TLC) Fleet Vehicle Loan Facility	<p>On 14 August 2024 the council entered into a loan facility agreement with Totally Local Company.</p> <p>The loan facility available is up to a maximum of £15.000m to meet the needs of the vehicle replacement programme and is available up to 31 March 2030.</p> <p>£1.100m was drawn down in Quarter 2 for the purchase of five refuse collection vehicles and there is a further £2.179m expected to be used before the financial year end.</p>
Children's Homes - External Placements	<p>The council has begun a programme to expand its in-house children's homes from two homes, to up to five. This will help reduce the high costs the council is facing for external placement. The first purchase was completed during 2023/24 and this home is due to open imminently.</p> <p>Work is now ongoing to identify and purchase two further properties - one property has been identified and an offer has been accepted. While this process is completed the search for further properties has been paused until completion is achieved.</p>
Leisure CIC – Loan Facility	<p>The loan was used in Quarter 1 2024/25 for the following investment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £427,500: Replace 3G Astroturf carpets at Stockport Sports Village; • £575,000: Gym refurbishment at Grand Central and Stockport Sports Village. <p>No further loans were drawn down during Quarter 2.</p>

Adswood Depot Redevelopment	<p>The Adswood Depot Redevelopment involves the comprehensive redevelopment of the Adswood site to serve as the council's main operational base for TLC and SMBC highways.</p> <p>The scheme is linked to the delivery of the Cheadle Eco Park development at the Bird Hall Lane site, with services relocating from Bird Hall Lane to Adswood as part of this scheme.</p> <p>Works are due to begin on site in early 2025 and complete in Summer 2025.</p>
Mount Tabor Refurbishment	<p>Works are planned to take place on Mount Tabour to provide additional capacity, improve accessibility and address condition issues with the existing building.</p> <p>Works are due to start on site in early 2025, and complete by April 2025.</p>
LAN and Wi-Fi System Replacement	<p>This project is in its early stages, expect the procurement phase to be completed by the end of first calendar quarter 2025, with roll out and spend in four phases over 2025.</p>
Education	<p>A collection of school schemes across all sectors relating to both maintenance/condition works and basic need provision of school places provide for the planned £16.082m spend in 2024/25.</p> <p>The council continues to review and assess school projects for the future linked to the latest asset management plan (AMP) reviews of all school buildings, funding available and deploy according to priority / needs (i.e., health and safety requirements, etc.). The £10.039m shown in 2025/26 will be used for key future school investments which are aligned to the strategic vision and the AMP priorities and will be presented to Capital Board for approval in due course.</p> <p>A number of schemes will develop across multiple years (i.e. into 2025/26 and beyond) until completion alongside any new schemes identified and approved for capital investment, with any further new scheme details/ commitments and updates to be reported in the future corporate scrutiny cycle.</p>