



Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Executive Summary
3. Scope of Responsibility
4. Assessment of Effectiveness
 - A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
 - B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
 - C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
 - D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
 - E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
 - F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
 - G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability
5. Overall Level of Assurance
6. Significant Governance Issues
7. How we have improved our governance arrangements in 2025/26
8. Forward Look to Governance

Appendix A: Internal Control Structure

Glossary

AA*	Appropriate Adults	Force	Staffordshire Police
AGS	Annual Governance Statement	HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
APACE	Association of Police Authority Chief Executives	ICV*	Independent Custody Visitors
CC	Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police	CISP*	Commissioner's Independent Scrutiny Panel
CFO	Chief Fire Officer of Staffordshire Fire & Rescue	PACCTS	Police & Crime Commissioners Treasurers' Society
DSC	Deputy Staffordshire Commissioner	PFCP	Police, Fire and Crime Panel
DWV*	Dog Welfare Visitor	SC	Staffordshire Commissioner
JARC*	Joint Audit and Risk Committee	SCO	Staffordshire Commissioner's Office
FARS	Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services	SGB	Strategic Governance Board
*	These functions are made up of members of the public		

1. Introduction



Ben Adams

Staffordshire Commissioner Police, Fire & Rescue, Crime

As the Police, Fire & Rescue and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire, I have the duty to ensure that we have robust Corporate Governance arrangements in place. To comply with this duty, my office is delegated the responsibility for the preparation and delivery of two Corporate Governance Frameworks, one relating to Staffordshire Police and the other relating to Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service.

This Annual Governance Statement (AGS) prepared by my office provides the public of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with an overview of how I have ensured compliance with the published Corporate Governance Frameworks for the year ending 31 March 2026.

Since my re-election in May 2024, I have developed and published a new Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan for my term in office, 2024 – 2028. These plans outline in detail my priorities for both services, following extensive consultation with the public and stakeholders.

My plans were published in December 2024, and copies can be viewed here:

[Police & Crime - Staffordshire Commissioner](#)

[Fire & Rescue - Staffordshire Commissioner](#)

Details of the full consultation can be viewed here:

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel, 18/11/2024 10:00](#)

My office, Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service all have a strong commitment to obtaining the best possible value for money, through effective commissioning, procurement and management processes that are supported by robust governance arrangements, and I realise it is immensely important for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent residents to see we are doing this.

I am assured that the services and functions within my office, Police and Fire, have taken significant steps to become even more efficient and effective this year and have delivered significant savings as outlined in the 2025/26 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

2. Executive Summary

The Staffordshire Commissioner's Office is required to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework, and to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) in accordance with statutory regulation.

The AGS is produced in line with the CIPFA Framework Principles: 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' (2016) and the addendum 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework' (2025).

The AGS confirms that actions taken against the 2024/25 AGS recommendations have strengthened and enhanced the governance arrangements for the SCO and demonstrate the growing maturity of the force as an organisation.

The SC is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place to ensure that the governance arrangements support the SC priorities in the Police and Crime Plan 2024-28: An outstanding local Police service, Preventing and protecting, Supporting Victims and Impactful partnerships.

Internal Audit Opinion

The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control. However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective.

Overall, this AGS concludes that the governance arrangements for 2025/26 are in line with the corporate governance framework and are fit for purpose.

Looking forward there will be significant changes to navigate following the government's announcement in November 2025 to abolish the PCC Model of Police and Fire governance in 2028. In addition, the impact of Local Government Reform and Devolution, and national Police Reform will need to be considered as new governance arrangements are developed. The SCO will work closely with local stakeholders and partners, and establish a Governance Transition Board to ensure that the risks associated with these challenges are mitigated and the governance arrangements are in place to manage the challenges.

In 2026/27 the SCO will be looking to strengthen the governance arrangements through the actions detailed in the action plan in Section 6.

Signature: 	Signature: 	Signature: 
Date: 30/06/2026	Date: 30/06/2026	Date: 30/06/2026
Name & Position: Ben Adams Staffordshire Commissioner, Police, Fire & Rescue and Crime	Name & Position: Louise Clayton Chief Executive Staffordshire Commissioners Office	Name & Position: Sarah Wilkes Section 151 Officer Staffordshire Commissioners Office

3. Scope of Responsibility

The Staffordshire Commissioner (SC) has the statutory responsibility to set the strategic direction and objectives of both Staffordshire Police (Force) and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service (FARS). In addition, the SC will hold to account the Chief Constable (CC) and Chief Fire Officer (CFO) for the performance or their service against the set objectives.

The SC has wider responsibilities for ensuring that the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office (SCO) business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. A cross-cutting objective through all these responsibilities for the SC is that public money is safeguarded and used efficiently and effectively.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the SC is responsible for putting into place within the SCO proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the exercise of its functions, which includes ensuring that a sound system of internal control is maintained throughout the year and that arrangements are in place for the management of risk. In exercising this responsibility, the SC places reliance on both the CC and CFO to support the governance and risk management processes.

The SC has approved governance frameworks with the CC and CFO that are consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidance 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' (2016), and the 'Delivering good governance in local government: framework' (May 2025) copies of which can be found on the CIPFA website.

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

This AGS explains how the SC has complied with the CIPFA code of practice for good governance and the legal requirements of Regulations 3, 4 and 5 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015) in relation to internal control and internal audit.

4. Assessment of Effectiveness

To provide assurance to the SC that appropriate management and reporting arrangements have been made and that these are adequate and effective, the key elements in place include the following:

- The Corporate Governance Frameworks;
- A Risk Management Strategy;
- An Annual Governance Statement produced by the SCO, the Force and FARS;
- The Police & Crime Plan (Force) and the Fire & Rescue Plan (FARS) that seek to focus activity on the issues of highest importance to the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent;
- Ensuring that there is an effective Internal and External Audit function.

A key feature of the Governance Frameworks is the system of internal control, based on a framework of robust financial and contract procedure rules and processes, administrative procedures, management supervision and a system of delegation and accountability. Responsibility for delivery against the framework and development of the system is undertaken by managers within the SCO, the Force and FARS and specific elements are reviewed by internal or external auditors as detailed:

2025/26	Internal Audit Provider	External Audit Provider
SCO	RSM (UK Group LLP)	Azets Audit Services LTD
Force	RSM (UK Group LLP)	Azets Audit Services LTD
FARS	RSM (UK Group LLP)	Azets Audit Services LTD

The Governance Frameworks are supported by:

- Performance management frameworks, which are focused on monitoring and achieving the priorities set out in the Police & Crime Plan and the Fire & Rescue Plan;
- Comprehensive budgeting systems that seek to align resources with priorities;
- Financial reporting, which routinely projects end-of-year outturn positions to allow early corrective action;
- A Commissioning Framework which details the approach to engagement with partners and to commissioning appropriate outcomes through third party providers;
- Engagement in value for money benchmarking such as is conducted by HMICFRS;
- Coherent Corporate Governance Frameworks which set out the rules and procedures for effective working within and between the SCO, the Force and FARS;
- An independent Joint Audit and Risk Committee (JARC) that is charged with seeking assurance over risk, governance and internal control for SCO, the Force and FARS;
- Independent Custody Visitors Scheme (ICVs) and the Commissioner's Independent Scrutiny Panels (CISP).

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- Risk Management Strategy, registers and action plans;
- Appropriate statutory officers within the SCO, the Force and FARS, who are key personnel in the respective leadership teams with relevant expertise and up-to-date training on strategic and tactical matters;
- Codes of Conduct and standards of behaviour clearly set out in governance documents and signed off by the SC.

Contained within the Governance Frameworks is the Code of Corporate Governance which sets out seven principles of good governance which are taken from the international framework, Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2014), with the aim of encouraging better service delivery and improved accountability, ensuring that organisations achieve their intended outcomes whilst operating in the public interest at all times.

The seven principles are as follows:

- A** Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- B** Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- C** Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
- D** Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- E** Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- F** Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- G** Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

This AGS will address each one of the seven principles, demonstrating areas of consistent compliance and additional work undertaken in the last year by the SCO.

A Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

The SC and the SCO are committed to the Code of Corporate Governance and operate in a way that promotes openness, integrity and compliance with relevant laws, regulations and policies throughout the organisation. The SC has signed up to a published Code of Conduct which is underpinned by the Nolan Principles of public life.

The SCO Chief Executive is the designated Monitoring Officer as well as the 'Head of Paid Service' for the purposes of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, as amended by the Police Reform and Social

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

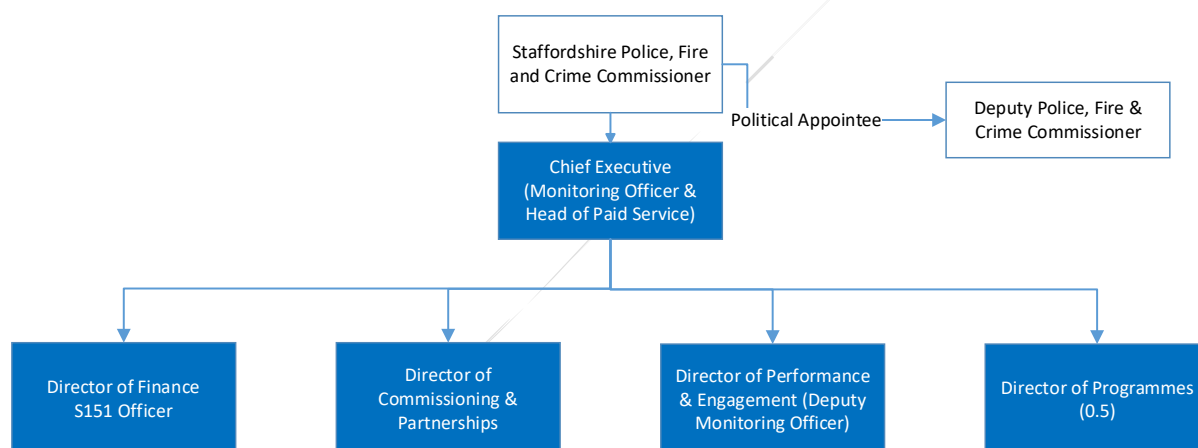
Responsibility Act 2011. The Head of Paid Service aspect of the Chief Executive role means taking responsibility for the coordination and discharge of the SC's functions and managing the SCO and the staff within it.

The Monitoring Officer's remit is to draw to the SC's attention any actual or possible contravention of law, maladministration or injustice. Guidance from the Association of Police Authority Chief Executives (APACE) Group is utilised to provide clarity as to the scope and extent of responsibilities and the detailed legal and statutory obligations that exist.¹

During 2025/26 the Director of Performance and Engagement in the SCO has been the Deputy Monitoring Officer and takes leadership on certain areas on behalf of the Monitoring Officer and acts as the Monitoring Officer in times of absence.

The SC is also required to have a Section 151 officer, (S151 of the Local Government Finance Act 1972) in this case, a Director of Finance, who has responsibility for finance and to ensure the dispersal of funds is appropriate and lawful. This post is supported by policies and procedures in place, including Financial Regulations and Contract Standing Orders; these have been reviewed and refreshed as part of the 2025/26 review of the Corporate Governance Frameworks.

Key posts within the SCO include:



In total, the SCO has a team of 25.63 fulltime equivalents.

Staff employed by the SCO are covered by the terms and conditions of the Police Staff Council. The SCO utilises the Force's People Services Function to act on their behalf on Human Resource and Organisational Development matters, as well as ensuring compliance with policies for computer usage, system access, IT services including data protection, information assurance and health and safety. In addition, the SCO also utilises IT and Financial Services provided by the Force.

Staff work within a structure with job descriptions and person specifications that ensure legal and statutory obligations are met and support the SC's strategy and priorities. All post holders have been recruited in line with the organisation's policies and procedures, including Police vetting, and have the skills, experience and qualifications required to undertake their role. All staff have access to learning and development

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/42/section/5>

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

opportunities and attend seminars and other training events to ensure that they are up to date and aware of changes to guidance, legislation and practice across all services.

SCO staff also comply with the Force standards for management of Police information and have access to the Force 'Bad Apple' reporting portal for Whistleblowing. Where there is a conflict of interest or a business interest, this must be declared to the Chief Executive and recorded through the defined HR procedures.

JARC continue to provide scrutiny in relation to ethical behaviour and professional standards within the service, including receiving and reviewing annual reports on Gifts and Hospitality and Complaints.

The SCO has a published Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy available on the policy page of our website: <https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/transparency/policies-and-procedures/>. This applies to the SC, the Deputy Staffordshire Commissioner (DSC) and all staff working within the SCO. The policy is designed to prevent, promote detection and identify a clear route for investigation. The approach set out in the policy also demands that organisations that the SCO work with act in the same manner.

In line with Force and FARS policy, through the one-to-one supervision sessions with senior officers of the SCO and senior Force or FARS officers, the Chief Executive and Director of Finance are made aware of any specific or potential risks of fraud or corruption.

The SCO and the Force receive and disseminate notices of potential and/or emerging fraud through a number of sources, including internal audit, other Police Forces and national bodies such as the Police & Crime Commissioners Treasurers' Society (PACCTS). Police and Fire both participate in the national Fraud Initiative programme and the outcome is reported and actioned where necessary by the SC's Director of Finance and the CC's Chief Finance Officer. Police and Fire staff can report any matters of fraud either directly to the Director of Finance or through the Whistleblowing Policies that are in place.

The SC and the Chief Executive are supported by both the Director of Joint Legal Services for West Midlands and Staffordshire Police and Legal Services for Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service on legal matters providing internal or external legal support as required. There are numerous examples of the legal services functions providing the support required, for example on major procurements, collaborations, or other complex matters.

The Equality Act 2010 has three aims to which the SCO must give due regard, meaning we consciously think about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision making:

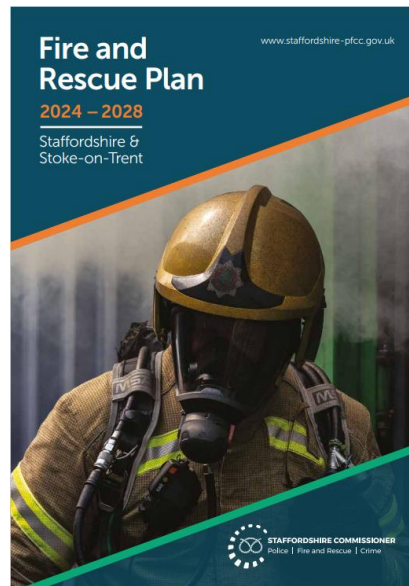
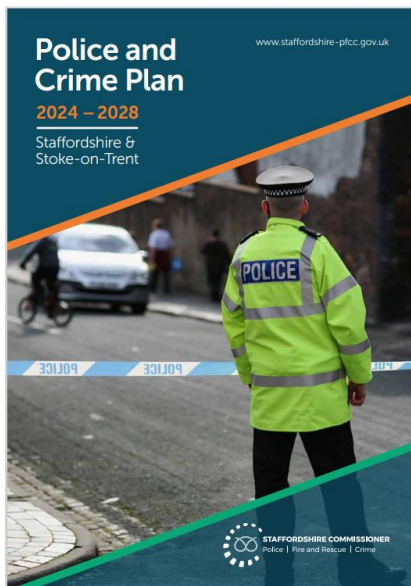
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it and;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

All decision forms reference the requirement or otherwise of an Equality Impact Assessment and, where necessary, these are then published with the decision form. Follow this link for all published decision forms: <https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/transparency/decisions/>

B

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

As the elected representative of the public, the SC has made a commitment to policing and crime clear in the election manifesto and embedded this with the development and publication of a [Police & Crime Plan 2024-28](#). In addition, the SC, through responsibility for the governance of Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service, has developed and published a [Fire & Rescue Plan 2024-28](#).



There is a statutory responsibility for the SC to obtain community and stakeholder views on Policing and Fire & Rescue services in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent area and the SC and the SCO are committed to openness, transparency and acting in the public interest.

Our commitment to openness, transparency and accountability can be demonstrated by:

- The SC and DSC signing up to a published Code of Conduct which is underpinned by the Nolan Principles of public life;
- SCO staff complying with the Nolan Principles and other policies and responsibilities e.g. information-sharing protocols;
- The SC's Police & Crime Plan 2024-28, Fire & Rescue Plan 2024-28 and other published documents, including the Annual Report, the budget report and the Annual Statement of Accounts;
- Information provided through the SC website, social media and other routes that provide local people with relevant information on performance and outcomes and the SC's intentions;
- Live webcasts of the Public Performance Meetings and the Police, Fire and Crime Panel Meetings;
- Appropriate use of the press and media by the SC and DSC;
- Decision forms relating to significant public interest, made available online for public scrutiny;
- Publication of information on remuneration and expenses;
- The establishment of a number of forums independent of the SC, comprised of members of the public, in particular JARC, CISP, ICVs, AAs and DWV. These panels scrutinise a number of areas within the SCO, the Force and FARS;
- JARC hold regular public meetings, meeting papers and minutes are published on the SCO website and there is provision for questions from members of the public;

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

- CISP Scrutiny Reports and ICV Visit Statistics are all published on the SCO website.

Our commitment to stakeholder involvement is demonstrated by:

- Consultation and engagement activity through the SC and the SCO, such as precept consultations;
- Reports to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel and attendance at other democratically led forums;
- The establishment of a number of forums independent of the SC, comprised of members of the public, in particular the JARC and the CISPs. These panels scrutinise a number of areas and publish their findings on the SCO website;
- Working closely with a wide range of partners, local authorities, Criminal Justice agencies, NHS bodies, private and voluntary sector organisations etc;
- Utilising a number of channels of communications for the public and other stakeholders. The SC and the SCO engages with various groups, organisations and people throughout the year, updating them on the work of the office, hearing their questions and views and providing answers that meet their needs;
- Commissioning a public confidence survey to understand levels of public confidence in policing in Staffordshire, gauge people's feelings of safety and capture residents' concerns. Telephone and face-to-face surveys were carried out in March and August 2025 with a representative sample of over 1,600 residents in each survey. From March 2026 a new provider will conduct online community surveys using an approach developed with law enforcement agencies in the USA. Surveys will be conducted monthly to provide real-time data to local policing teams and drive improvements in service delivery, engagement and public confidence.

In addition, the SCO both leads and attends multi-agency forums with its partners and stakeholders. In these instances, the SCO either develops or adheres to agreed terms of reference in terms of expectations. Examples of SCO-led governance structures are:

- the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Community Safety Forum,
- the Local Combatting Drugs Partnership,
- the Local Criminal Justice Partnership Board,
- the Commissioning and Development Board for Victims,
- the Domestic Abuse and Offender Management Boards,
- the Violence Reduction Alliance Executive Board.

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) also work jointly at a regional level. The Staffordshire Commissioner is the Chair, of the Regional Governance Group and Partnership Board (RGPB), attended by all four PCCs and Chief Constables, that oversees a number of regional collaborations, including the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU). A Regional Criminal Justice Forum provides a mechanism for PCCs to escalate issues and concerns from Local Criminal Justice Partnership Boards. Representatives from the SCO attend local strategic boards, operational boards and task and finish groups, across a broad portfolio including adult and children's safeguarding and young people. These structures enable and support partnership working, and provide opportunities to influence the development of multi-agency strategies, streamline planning, and joint commissioning and delivery of a broad range of activity and services, and provides the forum for stakeholders to monitor performance and constructively challenge one another and hold each other to account,

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

The SCO keeps local MPs and Councillors informed on the work of the SC and the office by sharing all news releases, including releases of particular importance issued by the Force and FARS. The SCO is a member of local and regional forums, where updates and activities can be shared with key strategic partners.

SC accountability is tested and challenged through a number of channels. These include the Police, Fire and Crime Panel, comprised of elected members representing local authorities from across Staffordshire who meet on a quarterly basis. The Police, Fire and Crime Panel holds the SC to account, scrutinises the SCO, Force and FARS performance and regularly reviews and scrutinises the financial health of the organisations, including the production of the Medium-Term Financial Strategies.

The Police, Fire and Crime Panel meetings are open to the public and are also broadcast live through the Staffordshire County Council website and are highlighted by the SCO Communications and Engagement team through the SC website, social media, as well as through local and national media. Questions from members of the public directly to the SC are welcomed at Panel meetings.

[Police, Fire and Crime Panel - Staffordshire Commissioner \(staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk\)](https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk)

The SC is required to publish certain information to allow the public to hold them to account. Section 11(1) and (2) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 requires an elected local Policing body to publish any information specified by the Secretary of State by order. The Elected Local Policing Bodies (Specified Information) Order 2011 ('the Order') sets out the information that must be published. Guidance on the order is published on gov.uk and Staffordshire's information is published clearly on the SC's website.

The national priorities for Policing are specified in the Police and Crime Measures: reduce murder and other homicide; reduce serious violence; disrupt drugs supply and county lines; reduce neighbourhood crime; tackle cybercrime; and improve satisfaction among victims with a particular focus on victims of domestic abuse. The intention of these measures is to complement existing local priorities set out in PCCs' local Police & Crime Plans. Each Force has a key role in supporting the measures, so that collectively we can see real improvements in outcomes over the four years from the baseline of June 2019.

The Order requires PCCs to provide a statement on the contribution of their Force to achieving improvements against those priorities. The SC complies with these requirements via the [Public Performance mechanism](#) where the quarterly Police and Crime Measures are reported and discussed. The SC publishes his reflections on Force performance and how the Force has contributed towards the delivery of the national measures, including contextual information that might help explain that contribution and the summary of planned action for the next quarter to drive the Force's performance against applicable measures.

C

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

The strategic priorities are set out in the Police & Crime Plan 2024-28 and the Fire & Rescue Plan 2024-28. These documents underpin the SC's overarching ambitions for delivering positive and sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The SC has an established office that works beyond governance and scrutiny to ensure that there is a longer-term strategic direction around all aspects of Policing, Fire and community safety and that, when put into practical terms, enables or influences delivery against the priorities.

Each of the priorities are reflected within the SC's performance arrangements which inform how effectively the outcomes are being delivered. The SC can then hold to account Chief Officers for that performance. There are three levels of accountability, which each include multiple functions for obtaining information on desired outcomes that are linked to the priorities:

Public Accountability

Ensures that the SC demonstrates the primary role of holding the Chief Officers to account and ensuring value for money whilst meeting the priorities and needs of the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Examples of this function would be the regular Public Performance Meetings, JARC meetings, Thematic Reviews and CISP Scrutiny Reports.

SCO Level Accountability

Examination of key activity at a strategic level allowing the SC to take a detailed, searching approach with consideration of all relevant issues. Examples of this function would be the SCO-chaired Strategic Governance Board and SCO attendance at all senior board level meetings, and SC and Chief Officer's informal and formal review meetings.

Operational Level Accountability

Generates a detailed understanding of operational areas where there are matters of concern affecting the effective and efficient operation of the Force, FARS or partner agencies. Examples of this function would be operational working groups and multi-agency workgroups.

All parties are committed to continuous improvement in managing performance as demonstrated by the commitment to have agreed Performance & Accountability Frameworks for both the Force and FARS.

The SC is committed to improving outcomes for the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent through partnership working with other agencies who are responsible for economic, social and environmental benefits. To ensure this happens, the SC has strategic overview and regular operational updates on the delivery plans owned by each team within the SCO. These plans are closely monitored by the SCO Chief Executive.

The SC's commitment to protecting frontline resources requires that the office devolved budgets are managed effectively and are sustainable in the medium to long term. Financial reports, including the Medium-Term Financial Strategies, are provided on a regular basis to both JARC and the Police, Fire and Crime Panel. These link to the delivery of the Police & Crime Plan 2024-28 and the Fire & Rescue Plan 2024-28, for which progress is also reported to the Panel.

The formal decision-making process for expenditure and changes to programmes, policies and procedures requires that an Equality Impact Assessment is completed as part of the process. This assesses the impact of any changes that may affect staff, stakeholders and the public.

Through the Local Business Case for Joint Governance of the Police Service and Fire & Rescue Service in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, collaborative working has continued to mature and grow. The joint enabling services are governed by the Strategic Collaboration Board and Strategic Estates Board, which regularly reviews opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness and identify new areas for collaboration.

D

Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Business plans are aligned and monitored against strategic priorities by each of the teams within the SCO to ensure that identified progress against those priorities occurs. The teams produce a report for the Police, Fire and Crime Panel meetings detailing progress on delivery against the priorities. A statutory Annual Report is published and presented to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel about the work of the SC in the proceeding financial year. Budget proposals are presented to the Police, Fire and Crime Panel and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy is available for review by the public and others. It is recognised that delivery of the SC priorities will require input from other agencies with responsibility for serving the communities of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent; for this reason, the report references SC operational updates and, where applicable, wider work undertaken by the SCO, the Force, FARS and other agencies.

Priorities are highlighted through press releases, SC social media and other communications to the public. Key strategic documents are published in hard copy form and electronically and are available to the public in copy on request or via self-service from the SCO website; this is also the case for SC newsletters and public consultations. The website is continually updated with latest news and publications that provide further information on how the strategy is being delivered.

There are formal arrangements in place to monitor against outcomes associated with decision making, performance and financial management across the SCO, Police and Fire & Rescue services. Monitoring methods and frequencies are contained within the relevant Performance Management Frameworks and meetings are held separately for each service to enable detailed scrutiny and challenge where exceptions occur. Where the response to agreed actions does not deliver expected outcomes, escalation to the Strategic Governance Board allows for robust challenge and necessary interventions by the SC. A Strategic Governance Board for Collaboration oversees progress in developing collaborative arrangements, shared services and facilities between the two services to maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

Governance arrangements for the Force changes in 2025/26 to enable greater focus and oversight of transformation programmes required to deliver the medium term financial strategy (MTFS).

E

Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Officers within the SCO have access to continuous professional development through the support mechanisms that are available at a national level (APACE/PACCTS). In addition, regular seminars are available that provide for more specific development needs. All staff have access to learning and development opportunities supported by a norm of one-to-one supervision and team meetings.

The SCO shares knowledge, learning and best practice through the Regional Policy Officers and the formal collaborative approach on services across the region. The SCO utilises the Regional Policy Officer resource to develop new areas of work and to maximise opportunities to commission services jointly for better outcomes.

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

The SC has promoted partnership working as a key facet of delivering the strategic objectives, and the involvement of the SCO Commissioning Team in these arrangements ensures that the SCO has a voice. This involves the SCO working closely with a wide range of partners, local authorities, Criminal Justice System agencies, NHS bodies, private and voluntary sector organisations, etc.

The SCO, Force and FARS operate through adhering to their Corporate Governance Frameworks. They are interrelated systems that bring together an underlying set of legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes to deliver a set of goals. The Frameworks have been aligned to the CIPFA Delivering Good Governance Guidance Notes for Policing 2016 and agreed by the SC. The Accountability and Internal Control Structures for delivery of governance arrangements by the SCO can be seen in Appendix B the internal structures associated Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue can be found within their Annual Governance Statement.

Within the SCO, statutory officers carry out their functions and offer the appropriate advice and support on matters within their sphere of responsibility in line with legislation. In addition, these officers, with support from other senior managers, deliver comprehensive business planning through individual service plans, service risk registers and service budget reporting which all ensure improved monitoring and continuous improvement of finances, performance and risk readiness.

Our Local Criminal Justice Partnership Board has fostered better working relationships between agencies and made substantial progress in year delivering against the board's key priorities and action plan. The boards focus remained on understanding local court backlogs better and escalating and influencing at a regional and national level.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Community Safety Board continues to bring together responsible authorities and other relevant organisations to deliver collaboratively on community safety outcomes for local communities. It meets three times annually and provides a structure for key organisations to collectively focus on shared priorities. This year several focus areas have been identified and progressed, including ASB.

The PFCC continues to operate as the Senior Responsible Officer for the county-wide, multi-agency Drug and Alcohol Partnership (DAP), which oversees local delivery of the national drug strategy 'From Harm to Hope'. Action plans for each of the priority areas: drug supply, treatment and recovery and attitudinal change continue to be delivered and overseen. Progress and performance are reviewed on a quarterly basis. Whilst the national focus for these partnerships is to deliver the national drug strategy, locally a decision was taken to extend the brief to incorporate alcohol, recognising its significance and impact. To this end, an alcohol needs assessment has been completed, as well as an Alcohol Strategy. Delivery plans will be operational from April 2026. The DAP provides a single setting for understanding and addressing shared challenges related to drug and alcohol-related harm, based on the local context and need.

The Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA) continues to oversee the delivery of the local Violence Reduction Strategy and is the accountable body for delivery of the Serious Violence Duty. The Board has utilised Serious Violence Duty monies, to support a few local projects to prevent and reduce violence. The PFCC is the convenor and chair of the VRA Board.

The Local Criminal Justice Partnership Board (LCJPB) continues to provide the vehicle for local criminal justice and related partners to oversee the delivery of seamless, prompt and effective justice. The LCJPB meets three times annually to preview progress against an action plan, designed to address local issues. The PFCC is the chair of the meeting.

Similarly, the multi-agency Reducing Offending Board and the Victim and Witness Board also continue to operate, providing strategic oversight and accountability for related agendas. The SCO chair both boards.

F

Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

The SCO recognises that robust risk management is a key function in the delivery of the Internal Control Structure for the SCO, Force and FARS and continues to closely monitor the registers and arrangements for recording risk. Annually, or in the event of a change that may affect them, the SCO reviews the governance frameworks and the internal control structure to ensure that they are effective in delivering the required outcomes and are fit for purpose.

Effective risk management is assured by the SCO in a number of different ways:

- A detailed SCO Risk Management Policy reflective of both the Force and FARS policies;
- Representation at the quarterly Strategic Risk Management Meeting chaired by the CFO;
- SCO-led Boards receiving and monitoring strategic risk for Force and FARS;
- Strategic Risk Register demonstrating a clear risk appetite is reviewed at SCO Management Meetings which is then reported routinely to each JARC meeting;
- A SCO Operational Risk Register and the use of risk management techniques in programmes and projects;
- Financial risks identified and monitored by the SCO and Force Section 151 officers as part of the budget setting exercise and the development of the medium-term financial plan;
- The Governance Frameworks, Financial Regulations, Standing Orders and the development of appropriate policy and procedure;
- The use of the Internal Audit function where the annual audit plan is directed towards risk and emerging issues, as well as auditing the risks around standard finance functions;
- The JARC, whose primary function is that of the Statutory Audit Committee, also provides independent review of risk management and internal control frameworks through their quarterly public meetings.
- External reviews and inspections including thematic reviews by HMICFRS which inform the SCO, the Force and FARS, highlighting risks and learning points in addition to good practice;
- Information Assurance Board, providing assurance against the areas of Data Protection legislation.

The financial performance of the Force, SCO and FARS is monitored through monthly budget monitoring reports that are discussed and reviewed as follows:

- The Strategic Governance Boards for both the Force and FARS receive detailed financial reports as a standard agenda item, with both boards chaired by the SC;
- The JARC receive quarterly updates from the Police, SCO and FARS;
- In addition, the SC holds a separate monthly SCO Management Meeting which also reviews the latest financial position and forecast outturn.

Any material budget variances are reviewed in detail and reported through this robust governance framework, with appropriate action taken to understand the implications of variances and to take corrective

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

action where necessary to manage the financial impact to the organisations as part of this good financial management and control.

A mid-year review of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was undertaken during 2025/26, this identified any significant issues arising and the impact upon the forecast outturn position and reserves. The update of the MTFS for Police, SCO and FARS was reported and scrutinised by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel in November 2025 in addition to reporting to JARC. This importantly reported on the significant uncertainty arising from cost pressures on pay and also the impact of high inflation on cost and estimated the impact in year and into the medium term. The Force has delivered the savings set out within the approved budget and has managed robustly the cost pressures arising during the year.

Despite the significant financial challenges, there has been a positive financial position across the Force and SCO during the 2025/26 financial year, with the reported year end revenue outturn position slightly favourable to budget of £0.790m. This small underspend in year reflects strong financial control within a challenging operating environment. The favourable position is also as a result of additional income from cash investments due to the higher than expected interest rates, together with an underspend on the SCO budget in relation to Commissioning Services.

The impact of the positive revenue outturn position for 2025/26 has resulted in an improvement in Earmarked Reserves. The General Reserve is compliant with the required minimum 3% level set by the SC. Total Reserves have improved during the last four years, and whilst they are not considered high by sector standards, the level of reserves is a visible sign of sustained and improved financial health for the group. A budget support reserve has been earmarked to support the MTFS pressures arising in 2026/27 as a result of significantly increasing costs experienced during the year.

The Commissioning & Partnerships Team lead on the development and maintenance of partnership arrangements, whilst overseeing the commissioning of services to assist the delivery of the Police & Crime Plan and any strategic priorities devolved nationally. This includes victim and witness support services (a statutory duty), alongside interventions to prevent crime (a statutory duty) such as those addressing violence, substance use, exploitation and offending. Commissioning is often carried out in collaboration with partner agencies to deliver more effective, joined-up, better value services. Multi-agency boards, action plans, contracts and performance frameworks are in place as needed to ensure delivery against the specified outcomes.

Regional arrangements are in place to ensure oversight of services delivered in collaboration. Such services include the ROCU and CT (across Staffordshire, West Midlands, West Mercia and Warwickshire Police Force areas), Firearms Licencing and Joint Legal Services (collaborations between Staffordshire and West Midlands Forces), and Fire Control (Staffordshire/West Midlands Fire service).

The SC continues to chair the regional collaboration group for policing that provides strategic direction, performance and financial accountability for the ROCU.

Staffordshire and West Mercia formed a new collaboration to deliver Public Protection Order Training at Cosford, following the withdrawal of West Midlands and Warwickshire Police.

Regional arrangements for Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) were reviewed in autumn 2025 and agreement reached to implement a break clause to enable forces to consider future options. The SC and Chief Executive are members of the PCER regional governance board, with strategic oversight and responsibility for performance and financial accountability.



Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

The SC and the SCO are continually committed to having the most robust system of public accountability and transparency. The SCO is compliant with the Freedom of Information Act and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) for Right of Access, and endeavours to respond to all requests in the required timeframe. This ensures that the public are able to access the information that legislation entitles them to. The SC uses 'live' webcasts of the Public Performance Meetings, and Police, Fire and Crime Panel meetings. The JARC Public meeting documents and minutes are all published on the website.

The SCO has Partnerships and Commissioning Strategy. The Strategy outlines:

- The function of the team,
- Commissioning methodology,
- Commissioning aims and principles,
- Budgets available and their application.

The Police, Fire and Crime Panel monitors and challenges the SC in delivery of the priorities at regular quarterly meetings. The Panel has a work programme that is aligned with the Police & Crime Plan 2024-28 and the Fire & Rescue Plan 2024-28 and has a statutory role in scrutinising the Annual Report and the proposed budget and precept. The Panel also holds the SC to account on specific matters, such as performance management and HMICFRS inspections.

The JARC undertakes the statutory functions of an Audit Committee and operates in accordance with the Financial Management Code of Practice for the Police Service and CIPFA's Practical Guidelines for Local Authorities. JARC receives training to assist them in undertaking their role.

Each JARC member has a particular area of focus, i.e. Finance, Risk, Governance etc to ensure that all aspects of governance are monitored throughout the year. The JARC continues to make recommendations to the SC, CC and CFO according to good governance principles and monitors these recommendations for completion. Also conducted by the JARC is the monitoring of Strategic Risk arrangements and recommending for approval the AGS and the Statement of Accounts, as well as putting decisions made by the SC, the Force and FARS through public scrutiny.

The Internal and External Audit functions also provide scrutiny across the SCO, the Force and FARS. Their conclusions and recommendations will always form an important aspect of the organisation's improvement plans. Actions taken against the audit recommendations are reported to the JARC Public Meeting.

Systems of internal control are key to managing the risk of fraud within the SCO, Force and FARS and these are annually audited and reported to JARC and the Strategic Risk Management Meeting where risks are managed and monitored.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit role is independent and used to provide support, assurance and evidence compliance for the organisations.

The Director of Internal Audit ensures assurance arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2010).

Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

The Head of Internal Audit plays a critical role in scrutinising the organisations by:

- Championing best practice in governance, objectively assessing the adequacy of governance and management of existing risks, commenting on responses to emerging risks and proposed developments;
- Providing an objective and evidence-based opinion on all aspects of governance, risk management and internal control.

The Head of Internal Audit ensures that there is an annual strategy and audit plan and that these are developed on a risk-assessed basis. Audit outcomes are presented to management and to the JARC in the quarterly meetings which are open to the public. Areas for improvement identified in 2025/26 audits have been reviewed with action plans established to improve as necessary. Actions are monitored and managed through corporate governance arrangements and reported on through to the JARC to review progress.

This work culminates in the annual audit opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal controls reviewed by the audit team. This annual opinion, set out in the Annual Report of the Head of Internal Audit, is one of the key sources of evidence in support of the AGS(s). The Annual Internal Audit Report (May 2026) concludes that for the 12 months ending 31 March 2026, the **DRAFT** audit opinion for the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office is as follows:

The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control. However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective.



External Audit

External Audit discharge a statutory function because of the special accountabilities attached to public money and how public business is conducted. External Audit are appointed independently from the SCO; the audit team complete an annual Audit Plan covering the work to be undertaken, including:

- An audit opinion on whether the financial statements of the SCO give a true and fair view of the financial position and of the income and expenditure for the financial year end;
- A conclusion on the SCO arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

External Audit also review and report to the National Audit Office (NAO) on the SCO Whole of Government Accounts return and conduct mandatory procedures in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the National Audit Office's 2015 Code of Audit Practice and the Statement of Responsibilities issued by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) Ltd. In completing this work, External Audit consider several key inputs:

- Strategic, operational and financial risks relevant to the financial statements;
- Developments in financial reporting and auditing standards;
- The quality of systems and processes;
- Changes in the business and regulatory environment;
- Management's views on all of the above.

The SCO and the Force external auditors, (Azets), and FARS external auditors (Azets) provide regular reports at JARC's public meetings and meet as required in private. JARC members, due to their independence, have the opportunity to consider the audit findings, to challenge and ask for further clarification where necessary and also to make recommendations on their findings. Azets are appointed as SCO and the Force external auditors and they have completed the 24/25 audit.

The accounts for the financial year 2024/25 have now been published. The delay was due to the planned phased approach to delivering the 2024/25 audits in light of a variety of complex factors contributing to audit delays nationally in previous years.

The financial accounts for the year ending March 2025 have been published in draft form, and will be audited by the External Auditors Azets over the summer.

5. Overall Level of Assurance

Action taken against the 2024/25 AGS recommendations, as reported in this AGS, have strengthened and enhanced the governance arrangements for the SCO and demonstrate the growing maturity of the force as an organisation.

The SCO has a system of internal control which is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. Internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the SC's priorities.

The SC is satisfied that appropriate stewardship is being applied to the use of resources by the SCO in order to serve the public interest and to adhere to legislation and policy and ethical values and respect of the law.

6. Significant Governance Issues (Actions 2025/26)

The continuous monitoring of the Governance Framework has led to continued strengthening of processes and allowed for areas of sustained improvement.

The details given within this statement represent a realistic view of the governance arrangements that are in place for the SCO and that for 2025/26 there is recognition that whilst there is strong evidence of sustained good practice, there is also a need for continuous improvement to strengthen arrangements, to ensure that the organisation achieves its intended outcomes whilst acting in the public interest at all times. Actions to be taken by the SCO in 2026/27 are therefore identified below:

Area requiring Action	Action	Owner	Target Date for Completion	Additional Comments
SCO oversight of Decisions, Business Cases, Major projects and Capital Programmes	To review Police and Fire processes for monitoring and evaluating decisions / Business cases, and if necessary, SCO to develop new process as part of governance arrangements	Director of Performance and Engagement	May 2026	Assurance required - clear recording of decisions (stop/go), target dates are met, new additions / changes in value / slippage are recorded, and effective evaluation and benefits realisation completed for all major projects and the capital programme.
SCO Governance Transition arrangements	Create new SCO transition board to maintain oversight and consider all matters relating to transitional governance arrangements	Chief Executive	June 2026	TOR to be developed in readiness for the confirmation and sharing of detailed policy underpinning new governance arrangements.
SCO Strategic Risk Register & Policy	Review and move towards force risk register methodology and presentation, to improve reporting and consistency	Senior Leadership Team	April 2026	Recommendation from JARC in November 2025.
Internal Audit Process	All internal audit reports to be shared with the SCO prior to publication.	Chief Executive	May 2026	Agreed process not adhered to in 2025/26, due to personnel changes within the SCO, responsibility for this area to move to the Chief Executive.
Chief Constable Suspension	On 01 August 2025 the Chief Constable (CC) was suspended from duty and remains suspended pending the outcome of IOPC investigations. Deputy Chief Constable Becky Riggs assumed CC authorities and continues to lead Staffordshire Police as Acting CC until further notice.	Chief Executive	Ongoing	As a result interim arrangements within the Force senior leadership team were required, and will continue until further notice.

7. How we have improved the governance arrangements in 2025/26

The Action Plan for 2025/26 has been reviewed and updated:

Area requiring Action	Action	Owner	Target Date for Completion	Action position at the end of 2025/2026
The 2025/26 budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is set against a backdrop that includes some significant uncertainties and new financial pressures for Force and Fire, that will require significant savings to be delivered as part of renewed transformation programmes in 2025 and beyond.	<i>That the SCO further strengthen SGB Governance arrangements to enable greater oversight of planning for and delivery of MTFS plans for Force and Fire throughout the year.</i>	Chief Executive	April 2025	The frequency and focus of SGBs changed in April 2025 and have been well received and resulted in greater assurance around MTFS and transformation. Agenda setting and preparation of papers for boards has continued to evolve throughout the year.

There were no outstanding actions from previous years and the action for 2025/26 has now been completed.

8. Forward look on Governance

In addition to the improvements identified in governance arrangements for 2026/27 (see Action Plan in Section 6.) the SCO has identified there are a number of significant changes that will affect the governance arrangements in the future.

These changes relate to Local Government Reform, Devolution and the abolishment of the SC position in 2028. The Police White Paper on national Police Reform published in January 2026, provided limited information on how new governance arrangements will work and which statutory duties and responsibilities will transfer from the SC to new governing bodies. The detailed policy is expected to be confirmed by the Home Office this spring, following which transitional arrangements will need to be developed and implemented to navigate these changes, whilst ensuring that effective governance of both services is maintained. In readiness, the SCO is developing a “transition board” with suitable Terms of Reference, to support the SCO and members of staff to manage the future changes.

The Police White Paper will also require additional planning within the SCO as a result of the new National Police Service and review of police force geography and proposals for force mergers outlined. In the short to medium term, these plans are likely to impact on regional governance arrangements and S22a agreements.

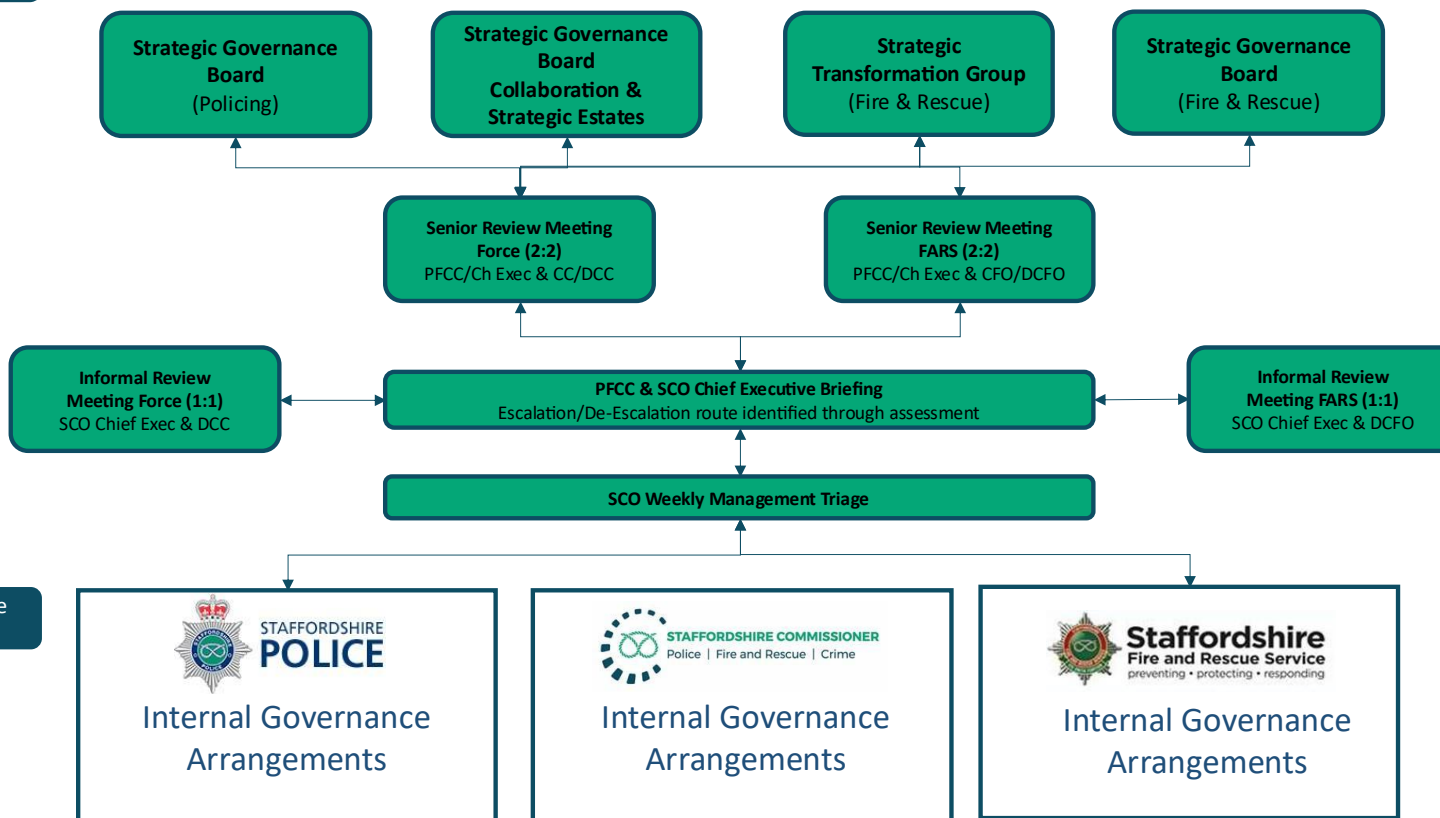
Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

During the course of the next few years, the SCO will seek to work closely with partners to ensure a smooth transition of functions as the appropriate time.



SCO Governance & Internal Control Structure Policing and Fire & Rescue

Chaired by the SCO



Attended by the SCO

Additional governance functions that feed into these high level arrangements can be seen in the supporting organisational schematics. 1



Internal Governance Arrangements

