



Staffordshire Commissioner and Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police

Joint Auditor's Annual Report
Year ended 31 March 2025

November 2025

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Headlines from our audit



Headlines from our audit

Purpose of this report

This Auditor’s Annual Report provides a summary of the findings and key issues arising from our audit of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) and the Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police (Chief Constable or CC) for 2024/25. This report has been prepared in line with the requirements set out in the Code of Audit Practice and supporting guidance published by the National Audit Office and is required to be published by the Authority alongside the annual report and accounts.

Our responsibilities

Financial statements	Narrative report and Annual Governance Statement	Value for money
<p>We provide an opinion as to whether the accounts give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Staffordshire Commissioner (PFCC), Chief Constable (CC) and group and of its income and expenditure during the year. We confirm whether the accounts have been prepared in line with the CIPFA/LASSAC Code of Practice in Local Authority Accounting (‘the Code’).</p> <p>Due to the challenges of undertaking an audit where the previous 2 years have been disclaimed because of the local authority backstop, it will not be possible to regain full assurance over the financial statements for 2024/25. The audit is currently in progress but there will not be enough time for us to undertake sufficient work to support an unmodified audit opinion ahead of the backstop date of 27 February 2026. This is due to the limitations imposed from the lack of assurance on opening balances and closing balances in key areas. We therefore intend to disclaim our audit report.</p>	<p>We assess whether the Narrative report and Annual Governance Statement is consistent with our knowledge of the Authority.</p> <p>We are unable to conclude the other information included in the statement of accounts is consistent with our knowledge of the PFCC, CC and group and the financial statements we have audited. This is because it has not been possible to undertake sufficient audit work to reach a conclusion before the statutory backstop date of 27 February 2026.</p>	<p>We are required under Section 20(1)c of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to satisfy ourselves that the PFCC and the CC have made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness (value for money) in their use of resources and provide a summary of our findings in the commentary in this report.</p> <p>We are required to report if we have identified any significant weaknesses as a result of this work.</p> <p>We have not identified any significant weaknesses in the arrangements for securing at economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources at the PFCC or the CC. Further detail is provided in this report.</p>



Headlines from our audit

Statutory powers

We may exercise other powers we have under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. These powers include issuing a Public Interest Report, issuing statutory recommendations, issuing an Advisory Notice, applying for a judicial review, or applying to the courts to have an item of expenditure declared unlawful.

Public interest report	Statutory recommendations	Advisory notice	Judicial review	Application to the court
<p>We may issue a Public Interest Report if we believe there are matters that should be brought to the attention of the public.</p> <p>If we issue a Public Interest Report, the PFCC and the CC are required to consider it and to bring it to the attention of the public.</p> <p>We have not issued a Public Interest Report this year.</p>	<p>We may make written recommendations to the PFCC and the CC under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act. If we do this, the PFCC and the CC must consider the matter at a general meeting and notify us of the action it intends to take (if any). We also send a copy of this recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State.</p> <p>We have not made any statutory recommendations this year.</p>	<p>We may issue an advisory notice if we believe that the PFCC and the CC, or an officer of the PFCC and the CC, has, or is about to, incur an unlawful item of expenditure or has, or is about to, take a course of action which may result in a significant loss or deficiency. If we issue an advisory notice, the PFCC and the CC are required to stop the course of action for 21 days, consider the notice and then notify us of the action it intends to take and why.</p> <p>We have not issued an advisory notice this year.</p>	<p>We may make an application for judicial review of a decision of an authority, or of a failure to act by an authority, which it is reasonable to believe would have an effect on the accounts of that body.</p> <p>We did not make an application for judicial review this year.</p>	<p>We may apply to the courts for a declaration that an item of expenditure the Authority has incurred is unlawful.</p> <p>We have not applied to the courts this year.</p>



Headlines from our audit

Findings and recommendations

Findings from our financial statements audit	Recommendations arising from our financial statements audit	Key recommendations arising from our value for money work	Other recommendations arising from our value for money work
<p>Our financial statements audit is currently in progress and due to conclude by the statutory backstop of 27 February 2026. Detailed findings from our audit of the financial statements, including our consideration of significant risks, are communicated in the following reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• audit opinions on the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2025• audit completion (ISA 260) report to Those Charged with Governance <p>Our audit completion report will be reported to the PFCC and the CC and to the Joint Audit and Risk Committee in February 2026.</p> <p>Requests for our audit completion (ISA260) report should be directed to the PFCC and CC.</p>	<p>Recommendations relating to internal controls and other matters arising from our financial statements work will be contained in the audit completion (ISA 260) report.</p> <p>From our work to date, we have not identified any recommendations relating to the financial statements audit which indicate significant weaknesses in the PFCC’s or CC’s arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the PFCC’s or CC’s use of resources and, as such, are not considered key recommendations. Should any such key recommendations be raised during the remainder of our audit work we will report these in our audit completion report and our auditor’s report (opinion) in February 2026.</p>	<p>We provide a summary of our findings in respect of value for money in the commentary in this report.</p> <p>Where we identify significant weaknesses as part of our review of the PFCC, CC and group’s arrangements to secure value for money, we make key, or essential, recommendations setting out the actions that should be taken by the PFCC, CC and group.</p> <p>We have not made any key recommendations this year.</p>	<p>We make other recommendations if we identify areas for improvement which do not relate to identified significant weaknesses</p> <p>We have not made any other recommendations this year.</p>



Value for money



Value for money

We are required to consider whether the PFCC and CC have each established proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of resources, as set out in the NAO Code of Practice 2024 and the requirements of Auditor Guidance Note 3 ('AGN 03').

We have completed our value for money work. Our detailed findings are reported in the following commentary in this report.

We have not identified any significant weaknesses in the PFCC's or the CC's arrangements and so are satisfied that the PFCC and the CC have made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of resources.

Reporting criteria	Planning – risk of significant weakness identified?	Final – significant weakness identified?	Recommendations made		
			Statutory	Key	Other
Financial sustainability How the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services	No	No	No	No	No
Governance How the body ensures it makes informed decisions and properly manages risk	No	No	No	No	No
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness How the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services	No	No	No	No	No



Value for money

The Staffordshire Commissioner (PFCC) and the Chief Constable (CC) of Staffordshire Police (the Force) are each responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of resources in their individual corporation sole legal entities. This includes managing key operational and financial risks and taking properly informed decisions so that they can deliver their objectives and safeguard public money.

As auditors, we are required to consider whether the PFCC and CC have each established proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of resources.

We performed risk assessment procedures at the audit planning stage to identify any potential areas of significant weakness which could result in value for money not being achieved. This included considering the findings from other regulators and internal auditors, reviewing records at the PFCC and Force and performing procedures to gain an understanding of the high-level arrangements in place. The resulting risk areas we identified were set out in our audit plan.

For each identified risk area, we performed further procedures during our audit to consider whether there were significant weaknesses in the processes in place at the Council to achieve value for money.

The NAO Code of Audit Practice requires us to structure our commentary on VFM arrangements under three reporting criteria: financial sustainability, governance and improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

We have set out on the following pages our commentary and findings on the arrangements at the PFCC and the CC in each area.

In addition to our financial statements work we performed a range of procedures to inform our value for money commentary, including:

- *Meeting with management and regular meetings with senior officers*
- *Interviews as appropriate with other executive officers and management*
- *Review of Council and committee reports and attendance at audit committee meetings*
- *Reviewing reports from third parties*
- *Considering the findings from our audit work on the financial statements*
- *Review of the PFCC, CC and group's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report and other publications*
- *Considering the work of internal audit and the counter fraud function*
- *Consideration of other sources of external evidence.*



Value for money

Overview

Staffordshire Police (the Force) is a police force covering a county which is 2,713 square kilometers in size. The area covered is diverse in terms of its geography and its cultures. It is made up of the cities of Stoke-on-Trent and Lichfield and the major towns of Stafford, Burton upon Trent, Cannock, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Tamworth and Leek. The Force is led by the Chief Constable. The legal status of the force is a corporation sole, named 'the Chief Constable of Staffordshire'.

The Chief Constable is held to account by the elected Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire (the Staffordshire Commissioner, or 'the Commissioner' or 'the PFCC'). The office of the PFCC is also a corporation sole, named 'the Staffordshire Commissioner'. In turn, the PFCC is held to account by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFPC) comprising members from the various local authorities across Staffordshire. The PFCC and Chief Constable work with eight district councils, Stoke-on-Trent council, local parish councils, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue and Staffordshire County Council in a three-tier local government system.

The Force comprises just over 2,000 police officers, around 190 PCSOs and approximately 1,400 police staff, as well as 150 special constables and around 100 volunteers. The force responds to more than 250,000 incidents each year and has a high satisfaction rating from victims of crime: 83% of victims are satisfied with the way their incident was investigated.

The Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan 2024-28 is a four-year plan that sets out the Commissioner's priorities and approach to ensuring local communities are protected. It outlines the key challenges and risks facing their communities and the strategies to address and reduce these risks over the coming years. The Force and the office of the Commissioner are enthusiastic about their focus on their communities. The group faces, over the medium term, significant financial challenge and increasing uncertainty over their longer-term income predictions.

Like all police bodies and the wider local authority sector, The PFCC and Chief Constable continue to face increasing financial challenges. The sector faces high levels of uncertainty over future levels of government funding and, for a number of years, has had to plan on the basis of single-year settlements. This makes it harder to produce comprehensive multi-year plans as part of medium-term financial planning. The government has signalled an intention to return to multi-year settlements in the future, and a national overhaul of local government, reorganizing multi-tier council areas into a series of unitary authorities with devolved powers at a regional, mayoral level. The changes proposed would impact the PFCC and Force through changes in the partners it works with and could impact the governance and oversight arrangements currently in place over the Force through the Commissioner.

High inflation over recent years has increased cost pressures on all local authorities' revenue and capital expenditure and, whilst it had been falling, in September 2025 inflation has remained persistently high at 3.8%, indicating reduced certainty about what the future may hold, economically. High interest rates have provided the PFCC with fortuitously higher than expected interest income on cash balances, but the combination of higher inflation and higher interest rates impacts local communities, including the communities the PFCC and Force serves across Staffordshire.



Value for money

General fund reserves represent 4.3% of annual spend, which provides a limited buffer against unexpected future shocks. However, the PFCC and Chief Constable have good arrangements in place, led by capable and informed management teams, which comprehensively understand the financial challenges faced and the arrangements needed for mitigation.



Value for money: financial sustainability

This relates to how the PFCC and CC plan and manage their resources to ensure they can continue to deliver services.

We considered the following areas:

- how the PFCC and CC identify all the significant financial pressures that are relevant to its short and medium-term plans and builds these into the plans;*
- how the PFCC and CC plan to bridge funding gaps and identifies achievable savings;*
- how the PFCC and CC plan finances to support the sustainable delivery of services in accordance with strategic and statutory priorities;*
- how the PFCC and CC ensure that financial plan is consistent with workforce, capital, investment, and other operational plans, which may include working with other local public bodies as part of a wider system; and*
- how the PFCC and CC identify and manages risks to financial resilience, such as unplanned changes in demand and assumptions underlying its plans.*

General fund

As at 31 March 2025 the general police fund balance held by the PFCC and Chief Constable was £9.8 million, marginally higher than the previous year at £9.6 million. Similarly, earmarked reserves increased from £35.9 million to £37.7 million, resulting in a total usable reserves balance of £47.5 million. This level of reserves is considered reasonable, given the Group's net expenditure of approximately £199 million in 2024/25, and provides a reasonable buffer against short-term financial shocks.

It is important to note that earmarked reserves are set aside for specific future costs, such as capital investment, operational pressures, and transformation programmes. Therefore, the £9.8 million general fund balance represents the true reserve available for unanticipated cost pressures and is a key indicator of financial resilience.

The 2024/25 budget was developed using a risk-based approach, aligning resource allocation with strategic priorities and identified risks. The PFCC's financial planning is underpinned by the principles of setting both a legally required balanced budget and a 'good budget', with emphasis on sound financial management and value for money.

2024/25 Budget and performance

The PCC and Chief Constable have continued to demonstrate a commitment to maintaining financial sustainability, despite evolving operational pressures and a challenging funding environment.

2024/25 concluded with a final outturn of £264.1m against a budget of £264.0m, resulting in a small surplus of £0.1m (0.06%). The outturn was delivered primarily due to effective cost control and delivery of 90% of planned savings, alongside higher-than-expected Home Office grant funding.

While the force achieved notable efficiencies in procurement and reduced external borrowing, these were offset by unavoidable cost pressures including pay awards, inflationary increases, and national ICT charges. Strategic contributions to reserves were maintained, with general reserves rising to £9.8m (3.69% of net revenue budget), supporting future financial resilience.



Value for money: financial sustainability

Nonetheless, the organisation managed these pressures through prudent use of earmarked reserves, maintaining a general reserve of £9.8m and total reserves of £37.7m at year-end.

Overall, the financial position remains stable, with appropriate governance and oversight in place to manage emerging risks and ensure the continued delivery of efficient and effective policing services.

2025/26 Budget

The PCC and Chief Constable have set a total net revenue budget of £277.6 million for 2025/26. This represents a £12.8 million increase from the 2024/25 revised budget of £264.8 million and a similar increase from the 2024/25 outturn forecast. The increase is primarily driven by significant inflationary pressures, including the impact of the 2024/25 pay award (4.75%), incremental progression, higher employer National Insurance contributions, and strategic investments in technology, estates, and neighbourhood policing. Staffing costs remain the dominant component of the budget, accounting for over 85% of total expenditure. Officer numbers will be supported through recruitment of 16 additional officers and transferees, alongside investment in proactive teams and specialist capabilities such as rural crime and roads policing.

The PCC and Chief Constable delivered 93% of the £6.6 million savings target set for 2024/25. For 2025/26, a further £9.98 million in savings is required, of which £8.9 million has been identified, leaving a residual challenge of £1.03 million. The PFCC continues to demonstrate a strong track record of delivering savings through a robust financial planning process that combines top-down strategic oversight with bottom-up engagement from budget holders. Use of £3.6 million from reserves is planned to balance the budget, alongside a precept increase of 5.12% (£14 per annum for a Band D property).

Medium term financial strategy

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) provides a structured approach to maintaining financial stability while delivering the priorities set out in the Police and Crime Plan. The 2025/26 budget has been balanced through a combination of precept increases, identified savings and planned use of reserves; however, the outlook over the next four years remains challenging. Forecasts indicate a significant funding gap emerging by 2028/29, driven by pay inflation, pension contributions and rising ICT and estate costs. To address this, the organisation will need to continue delivering efficiencies beyond the £9.98 million savings requirement for 2025/26, with further annual targets anticipated throughout the planning period.

The MTFS covers the years 2025/26 through to 2028/29. The MTFS is underpinned by a series of assumptions, including annual pay awards of approximately 2 - 3%, inflationary pressures on non-pay budgets, stable grant funding from central government and continued growth in the council tax base. These assumptions are subject to considerable uncertainty. Pay settlements above forecast, higher-than-expected inflation, or reductions in government funding would significantly increase the savings requirement and place additional pressure on reserves. The strategy also assumes that identified savings will be delivered in full and that transformation programmes will generate efficiencies without compromising service quality.



Value for money: financial sustainability

Reserves are maintained at a prudent level, representing approximately 3.5 - 4% of the net revenue budget, which provides resilience against unforeseen pressures. However, reliance on reserves to balance budgets cannot be sustained indefinitely, and the MTFS emphasises reducing this dependency over time. Despite these financial constraints, the strategy prioritises investment in officer numbers, neighbourhood policing, digital transformation, and estate rationalisation to ensure operational effectiveness and public confidence.

Key risks to financial sustainability include uncertainty over future government grant allocations, volatility in inflation and interest rates, and the potential impact of national initiatives such as pension reforms or ICT programmes. Scenario planning and stress testing are embedded within the MTFS to assess these risks and inform contingency planning. The overarching aim of the MTFS is to deliver a balanced approach that secures financial stability, maximises income opportunities, and embeds efficiency measures, while safeguarding frontline services and supporting long-term organisational resilience.

Alongside revenue planning, the Capital Strategy sets out how PFCC and CC will manage investment in infrastructure and technology to support operational priorities. Covering a four-year period, the strategy provides a framework for planning, prioritisation, and funding of capital projects, ensuring decisions are affordable, prudent, and sustainable in line with the Prudential Code. The capital programme focuses on four main areas: estates, transport, operational equipment, and information technology. Key objectives include modernising the estate to improve efficiency, upgrading ICT systems to enhance digital capability, and investing in operational assets such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology to support crime prevention and road safety.

Funding for the capital programme is drawn from a mix of reserves, capital receipts, and borrowing, with a clear policy on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) to manage repayment obligations. External debt has been reduced in recent years through the use of internal cash balances to settle maturing loans, lowering interest costs and improving affordability. The strategy is closely aligned with the MTFS and the Treasury Management Strategy to ensure that capital investment decisions do not compromise revenue sustainability. Risks include potential cost escalation on major projects, changes in borrowing costs, and the need to maintain sufficient liquidity to fund planned investments without impacting operational delivery.

Together, the MTFS and Capital Strategy provide a comprehensive approach to financial planning, balancing the need for investment in critical infrastructure with the imperative of long-term financial sustainability. Both strategies emphasise prudence, value for money, and resilience, ensuring Staffordshire Police can continue to deliver high-quality policing services in a challenging financial environment.

Management notes that the medium-term financial environment remains highly challenging and more volatile than in previous years. Inflationary pressures, pay awards and macroeconomic uncertainty continue to increase the likelihood of budget assumptions being materially tested during the planning period. While inflation is expected to ease towards the Bank of England's 2% target over the medium term, the risk remains that pay and price growth could exceed current forecasts, placing additional strain on staffing budgets and operational costs.



Value for money: financial sustainability

The MTFS assumes modest growth in central government funding aligned to inflationary expectations, but these assumptions carry inherent risk given the absence of confirmed settlements beyond the current year. Higher-than-anticipated inflation or pay settlements would significantly impact the cost base and require further savings or reprioritisation. Management has embedded scenario planning and stress testing within the MTFS to assess the impact of these risks and identify mitigation strategies.

The strategy continues to prioritise financial resilience through maintaining reserves at a prudent level and reducing reliance on one-off funding to balance budgets. Reserves are earmarked to support transformation programmes, capital investment, and anticipated pressures such as Emergency Services Network costs. This approach ensures flexibility to respond to emerging risks without compromising service delivery. Alongside this, the MTFS incorporates a strong savings programme and efficiency measures to address structural funding gaps while safeguarding frontline policing.

Despite the challenging outlook, the Commissioner and the Force have demonstrated robust financial management and responsiveness to in-year changes. The MTFS provides a comprehensive and well-structured plan that considers funding, expenditure, and risk, supporting long-term sustainability and operational effectiveness.

Minimum Revenue Provision

The PFCC is required each year to set a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). The MRP refers to the amount charged to the revenue budget for the repayment of debt, based on the underlying need to borrow rather than the actual debt held. This underlying debt is necessary to finance the capital expenditure programme.

Capital expenditure generally relates to assets with a life expectancy of more than one year, such as buildings, vehicles, and equipment. It is therefore prudent to charge an amount for the repayment of debt over the life of the asset, or a similar proxy, allowing borrowing to be matched to asset life. Setting aside funds for debt repayment in this way enables future borrowing to finance asset replacement without incurring additional cost. The method of spreading these costs is through an annual Minimum Revenue Provision, and it is therefore important that the MRP is sufficiently prudent to mitigate long-term financial sustainability risks. A prudent MRP policy ensures that the Authority sets aside adequate resources to repay borrowing over time, thereby reducing future financial pressure.

Following consultation, MHCLG have clarified and updated the regulations and the statutory guidance for minimum revenue provision. Although these take full effect from April 2025, the consultation highlighted that the intention was not to change policy but to clearly set out in legislation the practices that authorities should already be following. This guidance clarifies that capital receipts may not be used in place of a prudent MRP, that MRP should be applied to all unfinanced capital expenditure and that certain assets should not be omitted from the calculation unless exempted by statute.

The PFCC have a statutory duty under the Local Government Act 2003 to ensure its MRP is prudent. Indicators of prudence can be assessed by comparing the MRP to the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) and total borrowings and comparing the total borrowings to the CFR. An MRP level below 2% of the CFR and 3% of total borrowings may indicate increased financial risk. Where total borrowings exceed the CFR, this also indicates reduced financial headroom.



Value for money: financial sustainability

From our review, we noted that the MRP as a percentage of borrowings is 6.2% (5.3% in 2023/24), and the MRP as a percentage of the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is 4.6% (4.8% in 2023/24). This indicates robust financial resilience for the PFCC. Total borrowings represent 73% of the CFR. This is relatively high, but the risk this poses is mitigated by the prudence evident in the MRP set aside each year. The prudential level ensures that the PFCC are setting aside sufficient annual funding to meet its capital financing requirements.

Summary

We have not identified any significant weaknesses in the Commissioner or the Chief Constable's arrangements.

The Commissioner and Chief Constable have effective arrangements in place to plan and manage resources to ensure they can continue to deliver services. There is a good understanding of the financial position and the risks inherent in the forward-looking MTFS. There is a capable, experienced and informed management team who demonstrate a good understanding of the current position and future financial challenge. Arrangements in respect of financial planning, budget setting and control are in place and operating effectively.



Value for money: governance

This relates to the arrangements in place for overseeing the PFCC's and CC's performance, identifying risks to achievement of their objectives and taking key decisions.

We considered the following areas:

- how the PFCC and CC monitor and assess risk and gains assurance over the effective operation of internal controls, including arrangements to prevent and detect fraud;*
- how the PFCC and CC approach and carry out the annual budget setting process;*
- how the PFCC and CC ensure effective processes and systems are in place to ensure budgetary control; to communicate relevant, accurate and timely management information (including non-financial information where appropriate); supports its statutory financial reporting requirements; and ensures corrective action is taken where needed, including in relation to significant partnerships;*
- how the PFCC and CC ensure they makes properly informed decisions, supported by appropriate evidence and allowing for challenge and transparency. This includes arrangements for effective challenge from those charged with governance/audit committee; and*
- how the PFCC and CC monitor and ensure appropriate standards, such as meeting legislative/regulatory requirements and standards in terms of officer or member behaviour (such as gifts and hospitality or declarations/conflicts of interests) and for example where it procures or commissions services.*

Risk management and governance

The PFCC and CC have a separate but aligned approach to risk management, emphasising a systematic and consistent method for identifying, analysing, and prioritising risks. The PFCC acknowledges the importance of addressing issues and exploiting opportunities, in addition to controlling and mitigating risks. This comprehensive approach aligns with the goal of successfully achieving the Staffordshire Commissioner's and the Force's priorities. The document uses the term 'risk' to encompass both issues and opportunities.

The Commissioner holds a threefold responsibility for risk management, covering risks identified through PFCC operations, those escalated by Staffordshire Police, and those escalated by Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service. Legally, the Commissioner must maintain a sound internal control system, conducting regular risk management reviews overseen by various committees.

Staffordshire Commissioner is the Chair of Strategic Governance Board (SGB). The Strategic Governance Board within Staffordshire Police plays a pivotal role in overseeing and directing the force's strategic initiatives and ensuring effective governance. The SGB is primarily responsible for approving the Capital Strategy for investment and the Capital Programme, which involves making decisions about significant capital expenditure and ensuring they align with the Force's strategic objectives. Additionally, the board approves changes to the programme within financial regulations and endorses business case submissions for large projects, ensuring that these initiatives are both financially viable and strategically aligned.

The Strategic Governance Board (SGB) operates within a broader governance framework that includes other key bodies such as the Joint Audit and Risk Committee (JARC), previously known as the Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel (ETAP), and the Financial Investment Review Board. JARC focuses on scrutinising financial strategy documents, budget monitoring reports and the accounts, as well as matters concerning ethics and transparency, and the Financial Investment Review Board ensures the preparation of a realistic and deliverable capital programme.

Value for money: governance

The SGB maintains overall responsibility for strategic decision-making and governance. This structured approach ensures that strategic decisions, especially those involving significant investments and resource allocations, are made transparently, ethically, and in alignment with the force's objectives. The Commissioner is implementing some changes to the SGB, responding to the current improvements demonstrated within the Force which enabled the Force to be released from HMICFRS' 'Engage' monitoring. With greater confidence over performance, the SGB will now focus on performance quarterly rather than monthly, with dedicated agendas enabling a deeper review each quarter, and with other meetings being able to focus to a greater extent on the rising risks and challenges over finances.

Informed decision making

JARC plays a key role in ensuring that Staffordshire Police operates with integrity, accountability, and transparency. The Committee reviews the governance and assurance arrangements within the Force and Commissioner's office, receiving the reports of internal and external audits. JARC is responsible for scrutinising the implementation of audit recommendations and ensuring that appropriate actions are taken by officers to address any identified weaknesses or risks. This includes examining the financial management of Staffordshire Police and Commissioner, scrutinising the Force's response to strategic risks, and assessing how well the Force adheres to ethical standards in its decision-making processes. By providing an independent, external perspective, the panel helps to enhance public trust in the force, ensuring that it remains committed to the highest standards of transparency and accountability. JARC's role also extends to reviewing the Force's policies and practices related to ethics, ensuring they align with best practices and legal requirements.

JARC meetings are regular and is well informed on the issues and risks affecting both the Force and the Commissioner. The focus of the committee was recently realigned to increase the focus on risk and governance, in line with the Home Office Financial Code of Conduct and CIPFA guidance for police audit committees. The committee is well attended by the Force, with the Chief Constable or the deputy chief constable attending every meeting, and the PFCC's chief executive representing the Commissioner. This demonstrates the importance with which governance and assurance is held in both organisations and contributes to an effective and high-level full consideration of issues. The realignment of the committee's focus from an ethics, transparency and audit panel into a full Audit Committee has further strengthened the governance arrangements in this area.

Standards and behaviour

The PFCC and CC have established an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy to uphold integrity and transparency within their operations. This policy outlines a comprehensive approach encompassing prevention, detection, and investigation of fraudulent activities and corruption. All employees are required to adhere to this policy and are encouraged to report any observed breaches to senior management promptly. To facilitate the reporting of fraud, bribery, or corruption, Staffordshire Police provides accessible channels for individuals to come forward with information. Concerns can be reported through the Integrity Reporting Hotline or via email, ensuring that all reports are handled with the utmost confidentiality and seriousness.



Value for money: governance

The PFCC, in collaboration with the CC, upholds robust governance standards to ensure legal compliance and ethical conduct within its operations. The Chief Executive of the PFCC serves as the Monitoring Officer, bearing the statutory responsibility to uphold legality and accountability. This role involves proactively engaging in performance and development processes, including identifying training needs through job specifications and annual appraisals, to ensure all staff are equipped to meet legal and ethical standards.

The above key responsibilities are set to ensure alignment of the strategic priorities between the PFCC and CC. The PFCC for Staffordshire is responsible for setting the strategic direction of policing in the region, including developing the Police and Crime Plan that outlines key priorities for the Force. Essentially, the PFCC defines what needs to be achieved in terms of public safety, crime prevention, and resource allocation. In contrast, the Chief Constable is tasked with the operational delivery of these strategic goals, leading Staffordshire Police to ensure that day-to-day policing activities align with the priorities set by the PFCC as well; as delivering the objectives and priorities of the Force as set out in the Force Management Statement (FMS). The Chief Constable (CC) manages the police force, overseeing its resources, personnel and operations. In this way, the PFCC sets the vision for policing, while the CC ensures that the vision is realised through operational leadership and execution.

The PFCC and CC have a Gifts and Hospitality Policy in place to uphold transparency and integrity within the corporations sole. This policy outlines the approach to accepting gifts, gratuities, and hospitality, aiming to prevent any potential conflicts of interest or perceptions of impropriety. It applies to the PCC, Deputy PCC, and all staff within the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). The policy provides clear guidelines on what is acceptable and what is not, ensuring that any offers of gifts or hospitality are considered carefully and, where appropriate, recorded in a public register. This approach helps maintain public trust and ensures that decisions are made impartially and without undue influence.

The PFCC, the CC and senior staff within the Commissioner's Office and Staffordshire Police are required to declare any personal or prejudicial interests for transparency and to avoid conflicts of interest. The PFCC must declare such interests in line with the protocol between the PFCC and the Police, Fire and Crime Panel, ensuring that PFCC decisions are made impartially. Similarly, the CC and senior staff follow a declaration of interest process outlined in the Joint Corporate Governance Framework, ensuring transparency and accountability within the Force.

Internal Audit

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, in conjunction with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, require the PFCC and Chief Constable to establish an effective and independent internal audit function. As an independent and reputable audit firm, RSM operates in accordance with CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit and the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. Each year, an Internal Audit Plan is produced, focusing on key areas identified in the strategic risk register, assessing the operation of internal controls, and providing assurance on their effectiveness.

For the 12 months ended 31 March 2025, the Head of Internal Audit Opinion for PFCC and CC stated that the organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal controls. However, their work has identified further enhancement for the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective. These recommendation are presented to JARC. A follow up procedure is performed to ensure the recommendation has been implemented and update on the progress is presented to the JARC.



Value for money: governance

Budget setting process and budgetary control

The Risk Management Framework emphasizes the importance of establishing a strong budget. The framework clearly states that it applies to staff involved in setting objectives, formulating service delivery plans, budget setting, estate management, project management, and partnership management. Budget setting is one of the key areas to ensure the Service remains financially sustainable.

The Commissioner is responsible for setting the strategic direction and approving the annual budget for Staffordshire Police. This process involves aligning resources to the priorities set out in the Police & Crime Plan, ensuring statutory compliance and value for money. The Commissioner's Office monitors financial and operational performance throughout the year, supported by Section 151 officers who provide assurance on the proper administration of financial affairs. Multi-year settlements are essential to reflect inflationary pressures and avoid reductions in service, and notes that the precarious national financial position has required reliance on council tax precepts to balance budgets.

The Commissioner's Office operates with a lean governance structure, and it plays a critical role in securing external funding, such as the £977,920 Ministry of Justice grant for victim services and leads regional collaboration on organised crime and counter-terrorism. These arrangements ensure that governance remains transparent, proportionate, and aligned to statutory obligations while supporting the delivery of efficient and effective policing.

Management has a sound and transparent budget process, with a timetable accommodating other sources of funding, i.e., the precept consultation season with local authorities and the Local Government Finance Settlement from central government. The monitoring process further gives a sense of responsibility from top management to lower management levels. Regular meetings are held, ensuring transparency and enabling the identification of early warnings on spending and settlements. This allows the service to act effectively and adjust the budget where required.

Local government reorganisation

Local government reorganisation (LGR) plans were announced in December 2024 in a "Devolution White Paper" by Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Whilst it is early days, organisational change to the wider local authority environment is expected from April 2028. Staffordshire Commissioner and Chief Constable are engaging whenever required as this has will have impact on both organisations' governance in in future.

Summary

We have not identified any significant weaknesses in the PFCC or the CC's arrangements. The PFCC and CC have effective arrangements in place for overseeing their performance, identifying risks to the achievement of its objectives, the proper management of its risks and taking key decisions.



Value for money: improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

This relates to how the PFCC and CC seek to improve their systems so that they can deliver more for the resources that are available to them.

We considered the following areas:

- how financial and performance information has been used to assess performance and identify areas for improvement;*
- how the PFCC and CC evaluate service quality to assess performance and identify areas for improvement;*
- how the PFCC and CC ensure they deliver their role within significant partnerships and engages with stakeholders they have identified, to assess whether it is meeting its objectives; and*
- where the PFCC and CC commission or procure services, how they assess whether it is realising the expected benefits.*

Use of financial information

Financial performance and financial allocation are linked to the strategic plan as detailed in the Police & Crime Plan. The Police & Crime Plan outlines the strategic direction of the PFCC and CC for a four-year period, while the Force Annual Delivery Plans detail the plans for each year. The priorities cover:

- Local and responsive services,
- Preventing harm and protecting people,
- Supporting victims and witnesses,
- Reducing offending and reoffending,
- Creating a more effective criminal justice system.

The Force, with approval of the PFCC, created a risk-based budget for 2024/25 and similar has been created for 2025/26. The budget continuously prioritises the areas where risk is rated as significant but doesn't negate any operational requirements.

During 2024/25, the PFCC closely examined the Force's financial position, providing reports to the JARC on a quarterly basis. Their focus included scrutinising areas such as overtime expenditures and ensuring alignment with budgetary constraints.

There is a review of the Current Demand Assessment & Future Service Delivery Risk as well as a review of key performance data relevant to the business area. The Finance Panel meets every month. The Finance Panel operates as a sub-group of the JARC, with a different chairperson, ensuring a dual focus on various issues during meetings. This structure allows for specialised attention to financial issues, enhancing the organisation's financial oversight. The Finance Panel reports to the JARC.



Value for money: financial sustainability

Use of performance information

Call handling performance improved significantly, with 87 percent of 999 calls answered within ten seconds and non-emergency calls increasingly resolved at the triage stage, reducing demand on frontline resources. Digital transformation initiatives, such as the implementation of Salesforce for victim case updates and the rollout of Automatic Number Plate Recognition and AI-enabled speed cameras, have streamlined operations and strengthened enforcement capability. Workforce deployment was optimised through the Local Policing Model, which established ten Local Policing Teams aligned to council boundaries. Specialist units, including a Road Crime Team and a proactive rural team, were introduced to address emerging threats. These changes have improved responsiveness and enabled targeted interventions against high-harm crime.

Burglary fell by 20.8 percent, vehicle crime by 9.4 percent, and neighbourhood crime by 8.6 percent during the year. Victim services expanded significantly, with nearly 58,000 referrals to the Victim Gateway and over 21,000 victims accepting support. Specialist services for domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and hate crime provided tailored assistance to thousands of individuals. Safeguarding capacity was strengthened through the recruitment of 100 additional detectives in the Public Protection Unit, and targeted operations against County Lines and violence against women and girls resulted in arrests and the protection of vulnerable people. HMICFRS recognised these improvements in its PEEL inspection, noting progress in investigations, offender management, and leadership culture.

2024-28 Police and Crime Plan

The Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP) serves as a key body in scrutinising the activities of the PFCC and ensuring transparency in financial matters. This panel meets at least quarterly, with sessions open to the public and media, and holds the authority to veto decisions such as the precept, the appointment of a new Chief Constable and reviews of the Police & Crime Plan. In addition to the PFCP, the Police Finance Panel plays a crucial role in monitoring the financial performance of Staffordshire Police.

The Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan 2024-28 is a four-year plan that sets out the Commissioner's priorities and approach to ensuring local communities are protected. It outlines the key challenges and risks facing the Staffordshire community and the strategies to address and reduce these risks over the coming years. The plan outlines the strategic priorities and objectives to ensure effective policing, crime prevention and community safety. The plan focuses on key areas aimed at reducing crime, protecting victims, and improving policing services. These include improved contact centre performance, quicker responses to emergency and urgent incidents, safer roads, more effective criminal justice and reduced anti-social behaviour. There is an increased focus on victims and confidence. These priorities create a need to increase the capacity of Staffordshire police force. There is also concern within the Commissioner's office that wider system capacity is not yet able to cope with the improvements in performance from the Force, particularly regarding backlogs in magistrate and crown courts.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

During 2024–25, Staffordshire Police underwent significant external scrutiny by HMICFRS. The force was formally discharged from special measures in May 2024, marking a major milestone in its improvement journey.



Value for money: improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

The HMICFRS Police Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy (PEEL) report, published in September 2024, highlighted substantial progress in addressing previous shortcomings identified in the 2021/22 inspection. The report noted that Staffordshire Police had improved its investigative standards and its ability to respond to public demand. The Force demonstrated better use of data to understand operational pressures and allocate resources effectively. It also strengthened its management of registered sex offenders and individuals who had accessed indecent images of children, ensuring robust risk assessments and improved information sharing with safeguarding partners.

In the 2023/25 inspection, the Force was graded as follows:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Preventing crime	Police powers and public treatment	Responding to the public	
		Managing offenders	Investigating crime	
		Developing a positive workplace	Protecting vulnerable people	
		Leadership and force management		

Despite these advances, HMICFRS identified areas requiring continued attention. These include the timeliness of attending incidents, the assignment of appropriate outcomes to crimes, and reducing the number of abandoned 101 calls. The inspection also highlighted the need for consistent application of risk assessments in domestic abuse cases and greater use of body-worn video at the scene.

The PEEL report acknowledged a cultural shift within the organisation, with officers and staff expressing confidence in the senior leadership team and understanding the rationale behind a more performance-focused approach. While progress has been commendable, both the Commissioner and the Chief Constable remain committed to sustaining these improvements and addressing the remaining challenges to ensure the force delivers high-quality policing across Staffordshire. The next inspection is due in 2026.



Value for money: improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Partnership working

Staffordshire Police continues to place partnership working at the heart of its approach to community safety and crime prevention. The Commissioner's Office plays a pivotal role in convening agencies and ensuring that each partner contributes its expertise to deliver shared objectives. This collaborative model underpins the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan and strengthens the resilience of local communities.

The force works closely with nine Community Safety Partnerships across Staffordshire, supported by approximately £850,000 of funding allocated by the Commissioner to tackle anti-social behaviour and local crime priorities. These partnerships bring together councils, housing associations, health services, probation, and voluntary organisations to address issues such as youth violence, domestic abuse, and substance misuse. The Commissioner chairs the Staffordshire-wide Community Safety Forum, which meets quarterly to align strategic direction and ensure prompt joint action on emerging risks.

Staffordshire Police also collaborates through the Violence Reduction Alliance, which delivers targeted interventions to prevent violence, including initiatives addressing knife crime and violence against women and girls. The force works alongside safeguarding boards to protect vulnerable children and adults, commissioning specialist services to prevent exploitation and support victims. Multi-agency arrangements such as Integrated Offender Management ensure that offenders receive interventions to reduce reoffending, while joint work with health partners supports individuals with complex needs through mental health triage and the Right Care, Right Person model.

Regional and national partnerships further enhance Staffordshire Police's capability to tackle serious and organised crime, counter-terrorism, and drug supply chains. The force contributes resources to the Regional Organised Crime Unit and collaborates with the West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit to manage risks associated with extremism. These partnerships ensure that Staffordshire benefits from specialist expertise while maintaining a strong local focus. Through these collaborative efforts, Staffordshire Police demonstrates its commitment to working effectively with partners to prevent crime, protect vulnerable people, and deliver safer communities.

Procurement

Staffordshire Police's procurement approach for 2025 - 2028 is designed to ensure compliance with statutory requirements while delivering best value for money and supporting the organisation's strategic objectives. The strategy commits to full adherence to relevant legislation, including the Public Contract Regulations 2015, the Procurement Act 2023, Contract Standing Orders, and Financial Regulations. All procurement activity is governed by principles of transparency, fairness, and accountability.

The primary aim of the procurement function is to secure goods, services, and works that meet operational needs while achieving value for money on a whole-life cost basis. This includes consideration of social, economic, and environmental factors through a sustainable procurement model. The strategy emphasises ethical standards and responsible sourcing, ensuring that suppliers meet high expectations in terms of integrity and compliance.



Value for money: improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Professional procurement and commercial expertise are provided by a dedicated team, which supports all departments in managing supplier relationships and contractual obligations. The approach prioritises collaboration with internal stakeholders and external partners to deliver efficiencies and innovation. By leveraging aggregated demand and market intelligence, Staffordshire Police seeks to optimise purchasing decisions and reduce costs without compromising quality or service delivery.

The strategy also highlights the importance of digital transformation in procurement processes, aiming to streamline workflows, improve data visibility, and enhance contract management. This includes the use of e-procurement systems to ensure compliance and efficiency in tendering and supplier engagement.

Through these measures, Staffordshire Police aims to maintain strong financial stewardship, uphold ethical standards, and deliver procurement outcomes that contribute to operational effectiveness and public confidence.

Summary

We have not identified any significant weaknesses in the PFCC's and CC's arrangements. The PFCC and CC have effective arrangements in place for using financial and performance information to make informed decisions for improving the way they manage and deliver services and work with partnerships effectively.



