



**STAFFORDSHIRE COMMISSIONER**  
Police | Fire and Rescue | Crime

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# Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

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## Glossary

<b>AA*</b>	Appropriate Adults	<b>Force</b>	Staffordshire Police
<b>AGS</b>	Annual Governance Statement	<b>HMICFRS</b>	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
<b>APACE</b>	Association of Police Authority Chief Executives	<b>ICV*</b>	Independent Custody Visitors
<b>CC</b>	Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police	<b>CISP*</b>	Commissioner's Independent Scrutiny Panel
<b>CFO</b>	Chief Fire Officer of Staffordshire Fire & Rescue	<b>PACCTS</b>	Police & Crime Commissioners Treasurers' Society
<b>DSC</b>	Deputy Staffordshire Commissioner	<b>PFCP</b>	Police, Fire and Crime Panel
<b>DWV*</b>	Dog Welfare Visitor	<b>SC</b>	Staffordshire Commissioner
<b>ETAP*</b>	Ethics Transparency and Audit Panel	<b>SCO</b>	Staffordshire Commissioner's Office
<b>ETAP ERP*</b>	Ethics Review Panel for ETAP	<b>SGB</b>	Strategic Governance Board
<b>ETAP FP*</b>	Finance Panel for ETAP		
<b>FARS</b>	Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services		

\* 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 2025.

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 new 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 2024/25 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

## 2. Scope of Responsibility

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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 of 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 and Police', a copy of which can be found on the CIPFA website.

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.

## 3. Implementation

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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:

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2024/25	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 objectives 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 Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel (ETAP) 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).
- 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

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- 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.

**Please note:** Within this document, you will find boxes like this where actions identified by reference number in the 2023/24 AGS have been addressed. All previous years have been actioned.

In summary, these actions were:

1. The SCO is to develop and deliver a full induction package inclusive of a plan for the first 100 days in office of any new PFCC, ensuring that the new PFCC and any deputies are assisted in maintaining continuity, whilst also having the ability to bring their own strategic intent to the fore.
2. The SCO will support the SC to develop and publish within legal timeframes both a Police & Crime and Fire & Rescue Plan.

The full Action Plan for 2023/24 can be seen in Appendix A.  
For completeness, actions identified against this 2024/25 AGS are contained in Appendix C.

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**A**

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

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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.

# Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

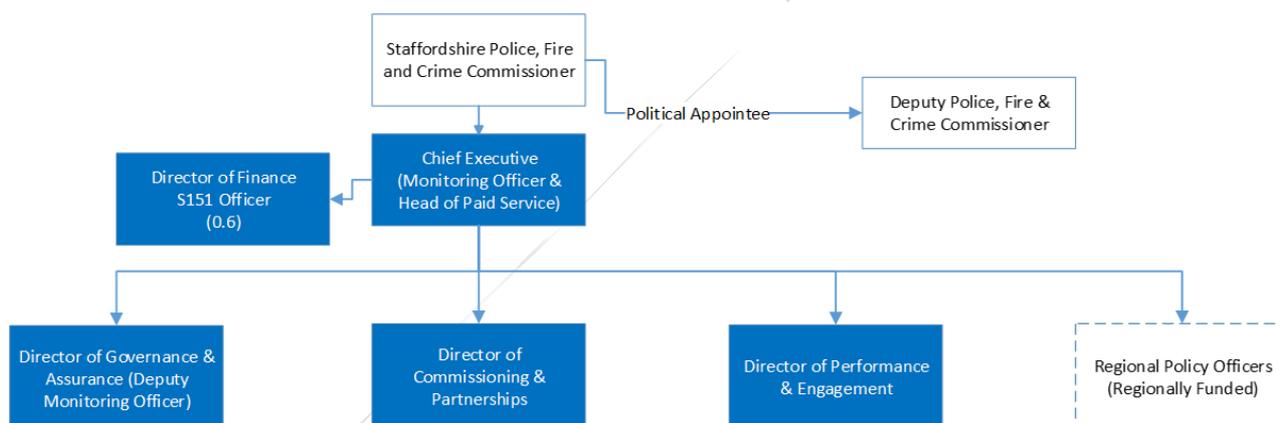
The SCO Chief Executive is the designated Monitoring Officer as well as the 'Head of Paid Service' for the purposes of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, as amended by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. The Head of Paid Service aspect of the Chief Executive role means taking 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.<sup>1</sup>

During 2024/25 the Director of Governance and Assurance 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 2024/25 review of the Corporate Governance Frameworks.

Key posts within the SCO include:



In total, the SCO has a team of 28.6 fulltime equivalents; some of these roles, although employed and managed by the SCO, are temporary positions funded through time-limited projects with partners and central government.

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

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

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 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.

## Action 1: AGS 2023/24

1. In preparation for the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner elections on 02 May 2024, induction and training plans were developed for any new PFCC and Deputy Commissioner (DC), to ensure business continuity was maintained. Following the re-election of Ben Adams as SC and these plans were used to support the appointment and upskilling of a new DC.

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.

The Ethics Review Panel (ERP), a sub-group of ETAP, was launched in January 2021. The Panel has continued to provide scrutiny in relation to ethical behaviour and professional standards within the services, including receiving an update on Gifts, Gratuities, Hospitality and Discounts. ERP also received a presentation regarding the Force's 'Ethics Channel', and the impact on the Force of the revised Policing Ethics Code. Additionally, a member of ERP attended the Election Task and Finish Group for the 2024 Commissioner Election process.

All review work undertaken by ERP when completed is published on the SCO website and can be found via the following link: [Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel - Staffordshire Commissioner \(staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk\)](https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/ethics-transparency-and-audit-panel-staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk)

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

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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:

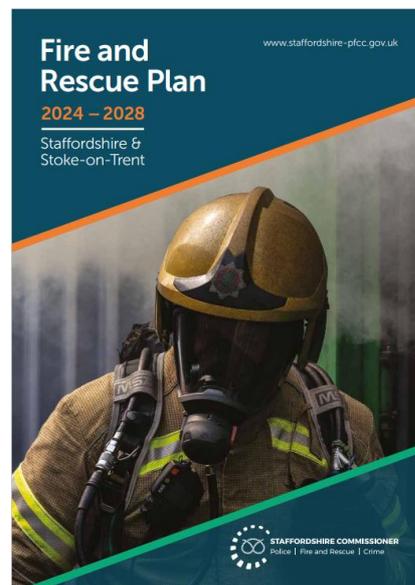
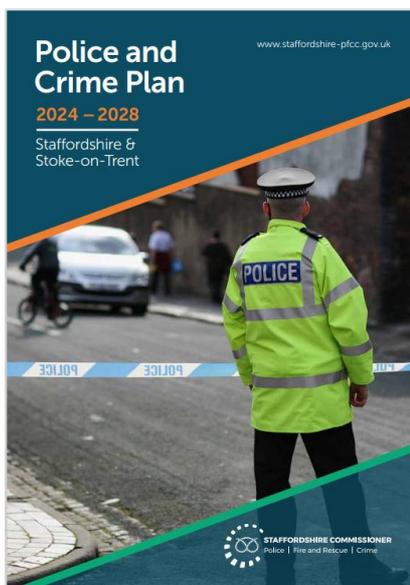
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it and;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic 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 ETAP, CISP, ICVs, AAs and DWV. These panels scrutinise a number of areas within the SCO, the Force and FARS;
- ETAP 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;
- ETAP Reviews, 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 ETAP 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 2024 with a representative sample of over 1,600 residents in each survey.

## Action 2: AGS 2023/24

The Police & Crime and Fire & Rescue Plans began to be developed at the start of the Commissioner's new term of office in May 2024. They have been shaped by public feedback gained through surveys and consultation exercises balanced against detailed assessments of demand, threat and risk carried out by the two services. They also consider national developments and inspection findings. A public consultation process took place prior to the finalisation and publication of the plans in November 2024, well ahead of the legal deadline for publication, which is March 2025.

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 also work jointly at a regional level, leading a Regional Governance Group, attended by Chief Constables, that oversees a number of regional collaboration agreements and a Regional Criminal Justice Forum. The SCO also attends local strategic and operational boards, along with 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,

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)

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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](https://www.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.



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

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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, ETAP 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, ETAP dip sampling 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 ETAP 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, 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 preceding 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.

As part of planned inspection activity, Staffordshire Police underwent an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) at the start of January 2022. As a result of this, notification of the engage stage with the inspectorate was received in June 2022, identifying two areas of particular concern. The first was in the area of carrying out effective investigations and appropriate ongoing support for victims, and the second was in relation to identifying and assessing the vulnerabilities of those who contact Staffordshire Police.

As at the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024 HMICFRS, in consultation with other police stakeholders, including the Home Office, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing, removed Staffordshire Police from the 'Engage' enhanced monitoring process after demonstrating improvements in those areas of concern. The SC will continue to closely monitor the force's performance on behalf of the communities of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to ensure that this momentum is maintained.

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## E

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

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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 such as those delivered through the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU), the Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU). 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.

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

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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. Focus shifted in the second half of the year, to understanding local court backlogs better and escalating and influencing at a regional and national level.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Community Safety Forum continues to bring together responsible authorities and other relevant organisations to deliver collaboratively on community safety outcomes for local people and local communities. It meets quarterly and provides a structure for key organisations to collectively focus resources and investment on shared priorities. This year a number of focus areas have been identified and progressed, including ASB.

The SCO 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 has been taken to extend the brief to incorporate alcohol, recognising its significance and impact. To this end, an alcohol needs assessment has been completed and is being used to inform the development of a local alcohol strategy. 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 number of local projects to prevent and reduce violence. The SC is the convenor and chair of the VRA Board.

## 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;

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- 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 ETAP Finance Panel;
- 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 ETAP, whose primary function is that of the Statutory Audit Committee, also provides independent review of risk management and internal control frameworks through insight meetings and when completing thematic reviews;
- 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 Finance Panel and ETAP 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 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 2024/25, 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 2024 in addition to reporting to ETAP. 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 2024/25 financial year, with the reported year end revenue outturn position slightly favourable to budget. This small underspend in year included an overspend on overtime offset by the number of vacancies carried during the year. It should be noted that the Force end the year with headcount above the Target Operating Model numbers. The small underspend is also as a result of additional income from cash investments due to the higher than expected interest rates. Plus, an underspend on the SCO in relation to Commissioning.

The impact of the positive revenue outturn position for 2024/25 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 2025/26 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 SC in the delivery of the Police & Crime Plan and any strategic priorities devolved nationally. This includes victim and witness support services (a statutory requirement), alongside interventions to prevent crime (a statutory duty) and projects to address violence, substance misuse and offending. Commissioning is often carried out in collaboration with partner agencies to deliver more effective, joined-up and 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 (a collaboration 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 and CT.

There have been a number of changes to collaborations during the course of the year, with Staffordshire and West Midlands Police mutually agreeing to disband the Central Motorway Policing Group (CMPG), and Staffordshire and West Mercia agreeing 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) changed again in 2024, following a robust procurement process to identify a new education provider. Staffordshire University were successful and a new S22 arrangement now exists between Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Mercia, to deliver the Police Constable Entry Route (PCER) programme. 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. ETAP Public meeting documents and minutes are all published on the website.

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

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- 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.

ETAP 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. ETAP receives regular training to assist them in undertaking their role.

The ETAP Finance Panel provides particular focus on finance issues and is chaired by one of the two Deputy Chairs of ETAP, providing for a dual focus at different meetings. ETAP continues to make recommendations to the SC, CC and CFO according to good governance principles and ETAP monitors these recommendations for completion. Also conducted by ETAP 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 ETAP 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 ETAP 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).

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 ETAP, the latter in detail through the Finance Panel and in the full ETAP forum, which is open to the public. Areas for improvement identified in 2024/25 audits have been reviewed with action plans established to improve as

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necessary. Actions are monitored and managed through corporate governance arrangements and reported on through ETAP 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 2025) concludes that for the 12 months ending 31 March 2025, 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, (Ernst and Young LLP), and FARS external auditors (Grant Thornton LLP) provide regular reports at ETAP's public meetings and meet as required in private. ETAP 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 have now been appointed the SCO and the Force external auditors and they have completed the 23/24 audit.

The accounts for the financial year 22/23 have now been published. The delay is due to the planned phased approach to delivering the 2022/23 audits in light of a variety of complex factors contributing to audit delays nationally in previous years. It is likely that nationally there will be an agreed narrative for accounts in this position but this is yet to be agreed.

The financial accounts for the year ending March 2024 have been published in draft form. It is unlikely however that these will be formally signed off by the new external auditors, Azets, due to the delay with EY LLP and the previous year's statements. A disclaimer has been added to the auditor's statements as they have still not received the appropriate assurance from the pension providers and they also cannot

substantiate the opening balances until that assurance and information is received. Azets consider it will be 27/28 before the assurances can be obtained and the opening balance substantiated.

## 4. Overall Level of Assurance

Actions taken against the 2023/24 AGS recommendations, as reported in this AGS, have strengthened and enhanced the governance arrangements for the SCO.

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.

## 5. Significant Governance Issues (Actions 2024/25)

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 2024/25 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 2025/26 are therefore identified below:

### Issue 01

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.

### *Recommendation:*

*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.*

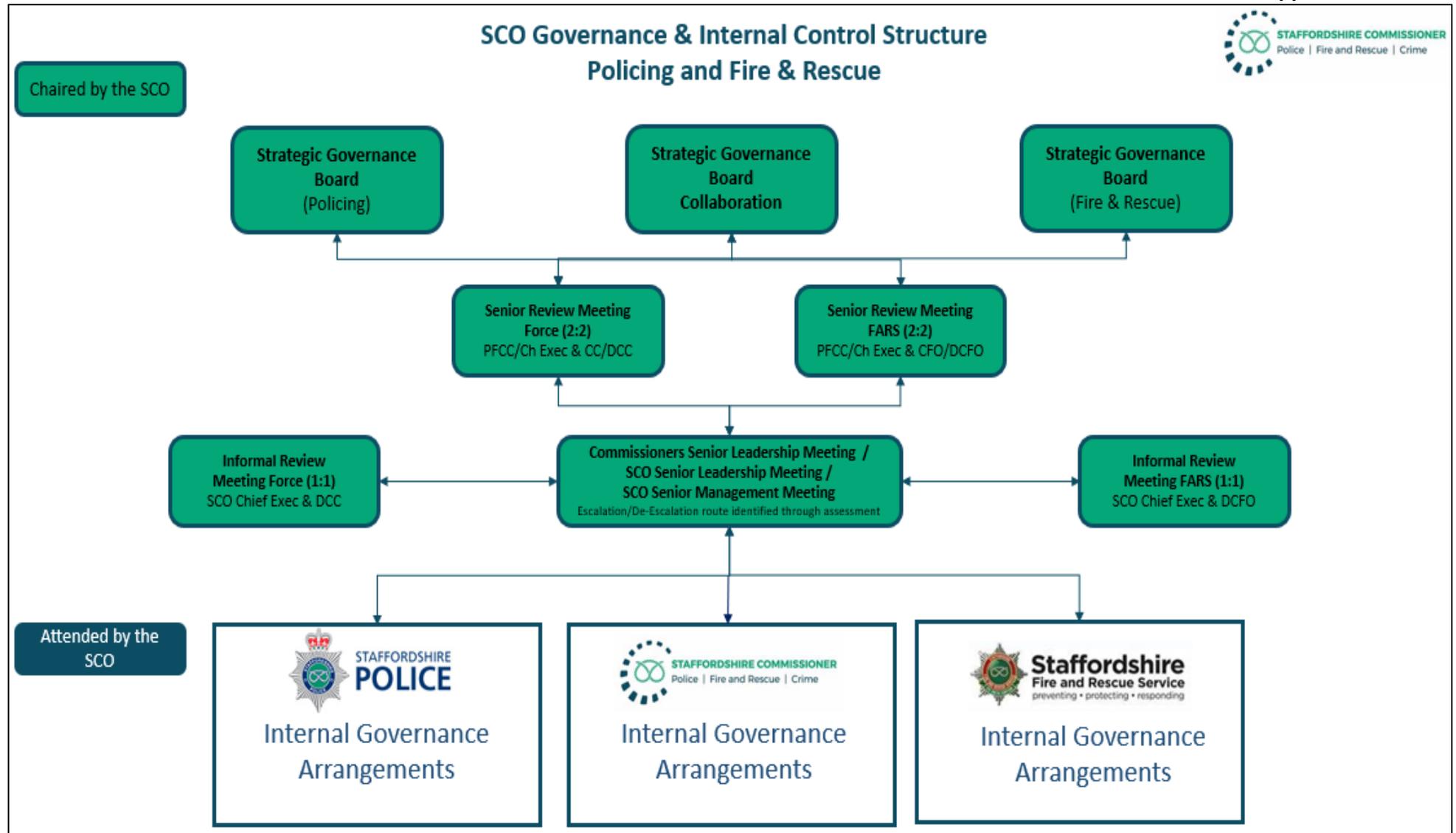
The issues identified above and the planned action in 2025/26 will enable the SCO to ensure that the statutory obligation of setting the strategic direction is fulfilled, that the governance frameworks and internal control procedures are robust, supportive of that strategic direction and fully meet the requirements as set out by CIPFA's good governance guidance.

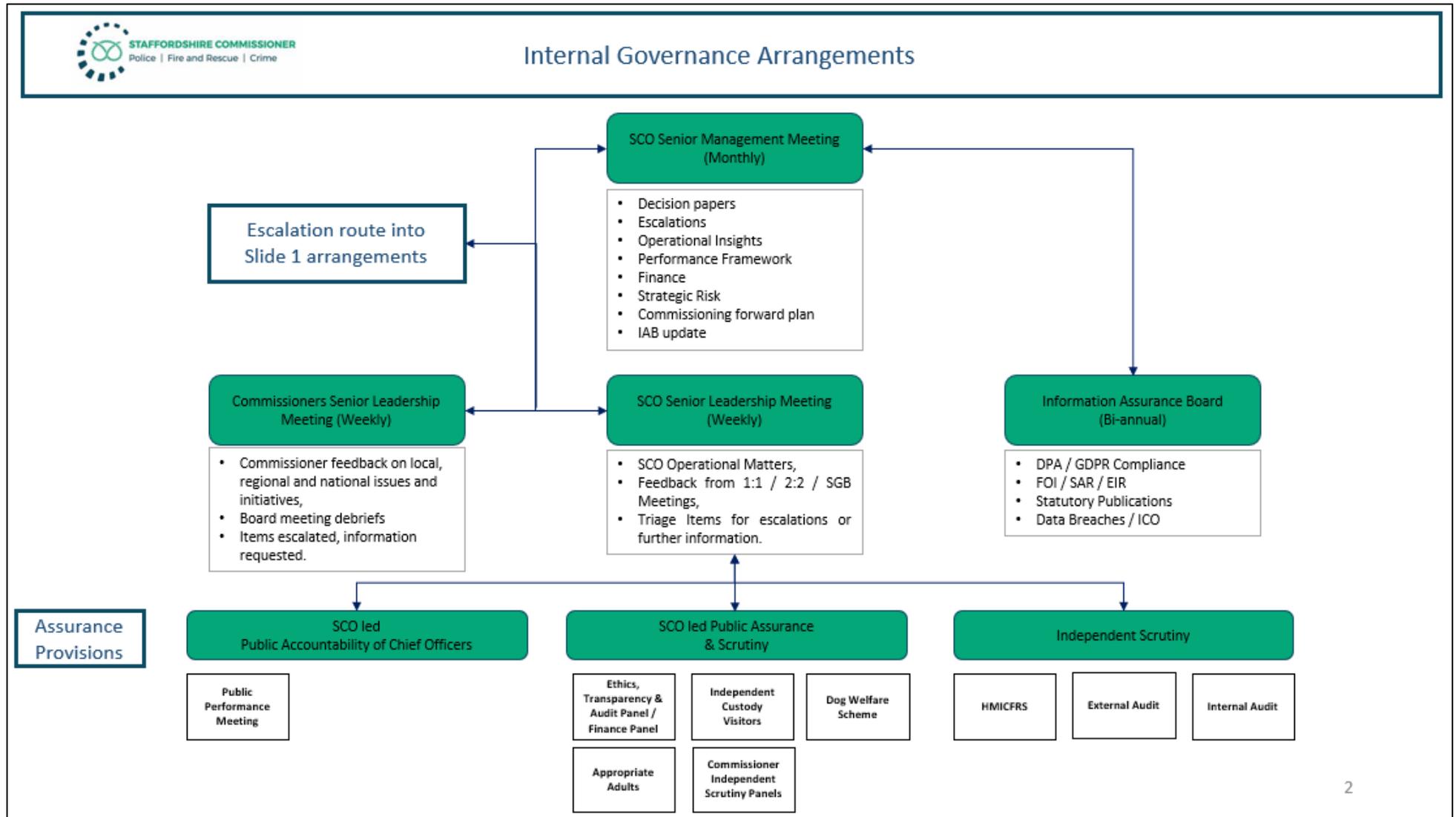
# Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Signature: 	Signature: 	Signature: 
Date: 13 February 2026	Date: 13 February 2026	Date: 13 February 2026
<b>Ben Adams</b> Staffordshire Commissioner, Police, Fire & Rescue and Crime.	<b>Louise Clayton</b> Chief Executive Staffordshire Commissioners Office	<b>Sarah Wilkes</b> Director of Finance (S151) Staffordshire Commissioners Office

### AGS Action Plan: 2023/2024

Ref No	Issue	Action	Update given on Page
1	The election for PFCC took place on 2 May 2024. The role undertaken by the individual has statutory responsibilities relating to two public services in Staffordshire, with also significant local regional and national roles that need to be understood to ensure appropriate governance and oversight is applied.	The SCO is to develop and deliver a full induction package inclusive of a plan for the first 100 days in office of any new PFCC, ensuring that the new PFCC and any deputies are assisted in maintaining continuity, whilst also having the ability to bring their own strategic intent to the fore.	7
2	The election for PFCC took place on 2 May 2024. The role undertaken by the individual has statutory responsibilities relating to two public services in Staffordshire and setting their strategic direction through production of both a Police & Crime and Fire & Rescue Plan.	The SCO will support the SC to develop and publish within legal timeframes both a Police & Crime and Fire & Rescue Plan.	10





### AGS Action Plan: 2024/2025

Ref No	Issue	Action
1	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>