

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 8 October 2020

Attendance

Ben Adams	Phil Hewitt	David Smith
Charlotte Atkins	Jill Hood	Paul Snape
Philip Atkins, OBE	Syed Hussain	Bob Spencer
Ann Beech	Julia Jessel	Mike Sutherland
David Brookes	Bryan Jones	Mark Sutton
Gill Burnett	Dave Jones	Stephen Sweeney
Ron Clarke	Jason Jones	Simon Tagg
Tina Clements	Ian Lawson	Martyn Tittley
John Cooper	Alastair Little	Carolyn Trowbridge
Mike Davies	Johnny McMahon	Ross Ward
Derek Davis, OBE	Paul Northcott	Alan White
Mark Deaville	Jeremy Oates	Philip White
Alan Dudson	Ian Parry	Conor Wileman
Janet Eagland	Kath Perry, MBE	Bernard Williams
Helen Fisher	Jeremy Pert	David Williams
Keith Flunder	Bernard Peters	Victoria Wilson
Richard Ford	Jonathan Price	Mark Winnington
John Francis	Natasha Pullen	Susan Woodward
Colin Greatorex	Kyle Robinson	Mike Worthington
Gill Heath		

Apologies for absence: Ann Edgeller

PART ONE

17. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

The following Members declared interests in accordance with Standing Order 16.5:-

Member	Minute Nos.	Interest	Reason
Mark Deaville	20	Personal	Director of Nexus
Jill Hood	20	Personal	Trustee of Stafford Age UK
Alan White	20	Personal	Wife works for a major supplier of flu vaccinations
Mark Winnington	20	Personal	Non-Executive Director of Nexus
Mark Winnington	20	Personal	Member of the Sow and Penk Internal Drainage Board

18. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 23 July 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 23 July 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

19. Chairman's Correspondence

Death of Former County Councillor Douglas Constable

The Chairman inform Members of the recent death of former County Councillor Douglas Constable.

Mr Constable represented the former Burntwood Saints County Electoral Division between 1989 and 1993 and served on the Council's Education, Fire and Public Protection, Policy and Resources and Planning Committees.

Cllrs Alan White, Philip Atkins and Susan Woodward paid tribute to Mr Constable following which Members observed a one minute silence in his memory.

Covid-19

The Chairman extended the Council's thanks to all those people who were playing their part in assisting in Staffordshire's recovery from the pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

She added that it was fantastic to see children return to schools last month and she paid tribute to headteachers, school and council staff who were doing an incredible job, making classrooms safe for learning, and acting quickly to keep them that way. She also paid tribute to the school transport team for rising to the challenge of getting all entitled children to and from school safely.

She also added that while many people were following government guidance and staying at home, this was not an option for frontline and key workers, who continued to care for and provide support within Staffordshire's communities. On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended an unreserved thank you to each and every frontline and key worker.

The Chairman also indicated that everyone had a responsibility to help to keep people safe, keep Staffordshire open and to do everything they could to prevent further restrictions and disruption to businesses, schools and our way of life. This meant that everyone should abide by the Government's guidance, wash their hands, cover their face in shops or on transport, and keep social distancing.

20. Statement of the Leader of the Council

Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 1, 2020-21

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Cllr Charlotte Atkins concerning the on-going financial crisis in the Children and Families Service and also in Social Care, and progress of the Council's Social Care Green Paper, Cllr Alan White indicated that, in the absence of the Government's Green Paper, Cllr McMahan was taking forward proposals for a Staffordshire Green Paper. Cllr McMahan added that Covid-19 had had a profound impact on the care home market and that the Council was to review its strategic

approach and plans to ensure that they addressed the ongoing challenges facing the sector. Cllr Sutton indicated that, with regard to the Children's Services, the County Council had invested £8.1m in the service to improve outcomes for young people and also to reduce the number of children who needed to be taken into the Council's care. He added that, amongst other initiatives, the Council was progressing with proposals for its own in-house residential Children's Home provision and was participating in the Big Fostering Partnership which was aimed at increasing the number of foster families and reduce the need for children to be taken into residential care.

Cllr Winnington spoke about the effect of Covid-19 on businesses in Staffordshire and made the following three pleas:

- At the next Council meeting can greater reference be made in the Leader's Statement to the economy and jobs;
- Can the County Council work with partners to ensure that Staffordshire businesses had the best offer in the West Midlands; and
- Can business start-ups be given the greatest priority possible.

In response, Cllr Philip White explained that the County Council had established an Economic Recovery Group; expanded the work of the Redundancy and Recruitment Task Force; was developing a Young Persons Business Start-up Scheme; introducing a Business Start-up Loans Scheme; working with the Local Enterprise Partnership to roll-out two new programmes in South Staffordshire and Tamworth; progressing measures to help the regeneration of Stafford town centre; were working on a comprehensive proposal to bring about a Staffordshire version of the Towns Fund; and was working in coalition with other authorities on a growth corridor. Cllr Alan White also added that the Cabinet, at its next meeting, were to receive an update on the impact of COVID-19 on Staffordshire's communities and economy.

Cllr Robinson referred to the overspend in Quarter 1 and to the Local Government Association's calling on the Government to provide additional funding for local authorities. He enquired as to whether the Leader shared the view that without this additional funding the Council would struggle to maintain the provision of front-line services at current levels. In response, Cllr Alan White confirmed that the County Council was continuing to lobby hard to secure additional funding for Children and Families and also Social Care.

The Award of the Service and Testing of Domestic Water Systems Framework Agreement

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Cllr Bryan Jones spoke about the importance of safe water systems which were considered to be the cornerstone of public health. Cllr Deaville added that the framework agreement would ensure value for money for Staffordshire taxpayers.

Provision of Apprenticeship Services

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Cllr Clements stated that she was pleased that the Council was to continue to procure apprenticeship training as this would support the next generation in receiving hands on

training and put their skills into practice. In response, Cllr Philip White indicated that the County Council currently had 118 apprentices in 22 different occupations and were working hard to increase those numbers. He added a note of concern that due to the Covid-19 pandemic the number of apprenticeships in the hospitality and leisure sectors may fall. He also added that the Council was lobbying Central Government for more flexibility locally on how the apprenticeship levy was spent.

Cllr Woodward referred to the Kick Start Scheme and how this was similar to the previous Future Jobs Scheme.

Delegation of authority to issue Directions under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations 2020
(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Cllr Philip Atkins indicated that although the Cabinet had delegated authority to issue direction notices to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Director for Health and Care in his capacity as Director of Public Health, it was important that there was a political input into those decisions and the Cabinet had therefore decided that, before issuing the notices, the Chief Executive will inform the Leader, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing and the Local Member of the intention to issue such notices.

Treasury Management Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2020
(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Cllr Sutherland indicated that the County Council had retained its Treasury Management Policy of using internal cash balances instead of borrowing money. This had delivered significant savings for taxpayers, as the infrastructure to deliver more skilled, better-paid jobs was being funded at a lower cost.

#DoingOurBit Community Grants Scheme
(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Several Councillors expressed their support for the scheme and also paid tribute to officers for the assistance they had given to Members in supporting local communities and voluntary groups through the People Helping People and Covid-19 Scheme Funding.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to when the Community Grants Scheme would go live and how it would be publicised. She also asked when details of Members' spend under the People Helping People and Covid-19 Schemes would be published. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that the Community Grants Scheme would go live shortly with the intention of the grants being paid to successful bidders by Christmas. Cllr Wilson added that the applications would open next week and aimed to support groups and organisations that helped meet the needs of vulnerable and older adults and/or the needs of vulnerable children and families in the county. The maximum grant size was £2,500 and successful bidders would be notified by 30 November.

With regard to Cllr Charlotte Atkins' question as to the publication of details of Members' spend under the People Helping People and Covid-19 Schemes, Cllr Wilson indicated that this information was available on the Council's website.

Cllr Woodward enquired as to who would make the decision on which bids would be successful under the Community Grants Scheme. In response Cllr Alan White indicated that the panel charged with making those decisions would consult with the Cabinet Community Support Members and the local Member.

Cllr Hood indicated that she hoped that the Council could improve its offer to those suffering with mental health issues.

Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board (Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Cllr Flunder indicated that he found the regular update reports from the Local Outbreak Control Board very useful and he requested that Members continue to receive those updates. Cllr Oates, Cllr Deaville and Cllr Peters also praised the work of the Local Outbreak Control Board.

Cllr Parry and Cllr Adams expressed concern that, during the current pandemic, residents were finding it more difficult to gain access to GP services and asked whether the Council could challenge its health partners on this issue. Cllr Pert added that around 80% of consultations by GP's were now being done virtually. Cllr McMahon indicated that Government were aware of these issues and also the impact of Covid-19 on screening services.

Cllrs Charlotte Atkins and Kyle Robinson referred to the issues which had arisen around national Covid testing capacity and asked whether this could be better managed locally. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that he agreed that this could be managed better locally and that these views had been expressed to Government. Cllr Charlotte Atkins also enquired as to whether the Council had looked at local lab testing capacity.

Cllr David Jones expressed his thanks to the council for its swift response to the Covid-19 outbreak in Silverdale. He also paid tribute to staff at Keele University who had taken action to ensure that students could return safely.

Cllr Clarke outlined his concerns that the local Borough Councillors were no longer taking part in the briefings on the actions being taken to address the Covid-19 outbreak in four wards within Burton upon Trent and asked whether this could be addressed.

Strategic Review of the Older People Care Home Market in Staffordshire 2020 (Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Cllr Brookes spoke about the need for a national planning reform to make it easier for people to obtain planning consent for changes to their homes where those changes would enable them to care for an elderly relative. He also called for a reform to the rating system.

In response to a question from Cllr Charlotte Atkins on the viability of care homes and the current occupancy rates, Cllr McMahon indicated that, initially, the demand for care home places fell dramatically due to Covid-19 and, at the end of September, occupancy levels had improved and stood at 87%. He added that Cabinet had therefore reviewed the Council's strategic approach and were making plans to ensure that they addressed the ongoing challenges facing the sector arising from the pandemic. Cllr Alan White added that the lack of action by Central Government had meant that the County Council had had to look at the levers available to the authority to care for and meet the needs of its older residents. He added that the Council had also been lobbying government to delegate to the Authority the power to do those things that were best managed locally.

Recommissioning of Home Care in Staffordshire

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Cllr McMahon referred to the Council's aim to support the development of home care, increasing supply and encouraging innovation, whilst avoiding large-scale disruption of the market. He also referred to the need to make job opportunities in the sector more attractive and more highly valued.

Nexus Trading Services Limited - Annual Report 2019/2020

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Cllr Deaville expressed his thanks to the staff of Nexus for their hard work and commitment in supporting those people who needed the Council's care. Cllr Francis also commented on how well the Company was run.

Street Lighting – LED Invest to Save Initiative

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Cllr Brookes referred to complaints he had received from local residents that some street lighting had not been installed correctly and was causing issues such as light pollution on neighbouring properties and were failing to dim in the early hours of the morning.

Cllr Jessel and Cllr Greatorex indicated that upon completion of all four phases the project, energy consumption would be reduced by 8,627,502 kWh which equated to a carbon emission reduction of 2,650 tonnes and energy savings in the region of £1.6m per annum. Cllr Woodward, Cllr Hussain and Cllr Smith also expressed their support for the initiative. Cllr Hussain also requested that Members receive information of the timescales for the project so that they are aware of when works would be undertaken in their area.

Additional Investment in Community Highways Issues

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Cllr Brookes highlighted the difficulties which arose when utility companies failed to give notice of their intention to undertake works on the County's roads. Cllr Woodward and Cllr Smith also spoke about flooding and the Council's relationship with Severn Trent Water in relation to drainage issues. Cllr Dave Jones added that a lot of flooding was a direct result of Severn Trent Water's aging and inadequate infrastructure and urged the

Cabinet Member to take them to task over this issue. Cllr Pert also requested that the Cabinet remind landowners of their role regarding the discharge of water from private land; address all known flooding hotspots; and oppose planning applications that might bring a risk of flooding or require unfunded infrastructure improvements.

Cllr Jessel informed Members that one of her main priorities this year was to review flood risk management and the working arrangements with partner organisations.

Cllr David Williams added that priority was to be given to gully emptying, additional grass cutting, encouraging farmers to comply with their responsibilities where public rights of way crossed their land, increased road sweeping to help alleviate the risk of blocked gullies and bringing forward improved information for Members.

Consultation on Proposals for Changes to Marshlands School and Greenhall Nursery

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Cllr Francis welcomed the proposals for changes to the two Schools and expressed the view that they were jewels in Staffordshire's crown. Cllr Price added that the changes were necessary and that they were supported by the governing bodies of both schools.

Thank you to schools

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Cllr Robinson and Cllr Dave Jones indicated that they echoed the Leader's thanks to teachers, the wider school staff and to parents for their efforts and support in getting Staffordshire schools ready to welcome pupils back this term. Cllr Robinson added that, during the pandemic, many Staffordshire schools had stayed open to provide for the children of key workers. He, together with Cllr Dave Jones, Cllr Hood and Cllr Price, also extended their thanks to all schools, colleges and universities in Staffordshire.

Flu

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Cllr Dave Jones concerning whether there was an adequate supply of the Flu vaccine in Staffordshire, Cllr McMahon indicated that this matter had been raised with the Chair of the Integrated Care System for the County. He added that he was reassured that when the local resources were depleted, there was a central resource which would be utilised. He also encouraged those who were eligible for the vaccine to ensure that they received it.

Covid-19 Testing

(Paragraph 16 of the Statement)

Cllr Trowbridge asked Members to encourage their residents to download the NHS Covid-19 App for their smartphone as this was vital in helping to tackle the pandemic. In response, Cllr McMahon thanked Cllr Trowbridge for raising this matter but added a note of caution and reminded Members that installing the App should not lead people into a false sense of security as it would not prevent them from contracting Covid-19.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins indicated that it was laudable that the County Council had tried to fill the gap arising from the inadequacies of the national testing system but enquired as to whether the national and the Council's local systems were coordinated. She also enquired as to whether care home residents and staff were tested regularly and routinely and also whether the Leader thought that the Government had learned from its mistakes on testing and tracing. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that the booking systems for the national and local testing were separate and that residents were requested to first check availability on the national site and if there was no availability, they could then go on to the local site. With regard to the testing of care home residents and staff, Cllr McMahon confirmed that staff were tested weekly and residents monthly.

Cllr Dave Jones referred to the capacity for Covid testing at laboratory level and indicated that there was additional capacity sitting in universities across the Country but that this was not being used due to "red tape", and that this issue needed to be addressed by Central Government. Cllr McMahon thanked Cllr Jones for his comments and undertook to pursue this issue further.

Cllr Pert spoke about the long-lasting impact of the pandemic on people's mental health and the role which Members could play in promoting good mental health. In response, Cllr McMahon referred to how the County Council was supporting communities through initiatives such as the #DoingOurBit Community Grants Scheme.

Cllr Alan White informed the Council that he, together with the Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, had sent an open letter to the Secretary of State imploring that the Government gives the Councils the resources they required.

Covid-19 – The Next Six Months

(Paragraph 17 of the Statement)

Cllr Philip Atkins and Cllr Tagg spoke about the need to "keep Staffordshire open for business" and the impact of the Covid pandemic on businesses particularly in the hospitality and leisure sectors, which were likely to see redundancies, and the need for the Council to plan to respond to this eventuality. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that it was inevitable that some businesses would suffer as a result of the on-going pandemic but that the County Council was doing what it could to address the situation through a range of initiatives.

Cllr Hussain spoke about the need for residents to follow the Covid-19 guidance including wearing face masks, social distancing and washing hands regularly. He also referred to the tremendous support given by the County Council in responding to the Covid-19 outbreak in Burton upon Trent. Cllr Peters also paid tribute to the faith groups in Burton for the important role they had played.

RESOLVED – That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received.

21. People Helping People Fund - Annual Report and next steps 2019/20

Members considered the Annual Report for the People Helping People Fund. They were informed that the Fund saw £2500 allocated to each County Councillor, to invest in projects about keeping people independent, healthy and supported within the places

they live. Councillors were able to use as much or as little of this £2500 as they wanted to support projects which needed it, or even to work together with other councillors and jointly support bigger projects.

The rules of the Fund were designed to ensure that projects would make a tangible difference, were things that mattered to the local community, and were about building on the success and energy that already existed across Staffordshire, or helping to create it where it didn't exist already.

As a new way of working, the People Helping People Fund in 2019/20 had been a successful shift and formed a great foundation to build on. Though the coronavirus pandemic meant that the County Council naturally refocused its resources to help with the crisis, it was hoped that by next year the timing would be right to move the County Councillors' fund back towards a targeted approach aimed at making a real and lasting difference – building on the success so far and taking it further.

Members noted that:

- The final total grant awarded was £86,127 (out of £155,000 total budget)
- This raised a total match value of £276,035, which in terms of a return on investment was more than £3 for every £1 spent through the Fund.
- The Fund had supported the delivery of projects (or parts of projects) worth a total of £362,162.

Several Members spoke about how the Fund had been utilised in their area and had made a difference to people's lives.

Cllr Little asked that when introducing similar initiatives in the future, neighbourhood fetes etc should not be forgotten as they played an important role in social cohesion. Cllr Snape also paid tribute to those officers who had assisted Members in considering the applications and awarding funding under the scheme.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

22. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Cllr Adams indicated that he welcomed the news that the HMICFRS PEEL inspection of Staffordshire Police in 2018/19 had given an overall rating for Staffordshire Police as "Good". He, together with Cllr Trowbridge, added that, alongside the Fire and Rescue Service report, this showed that the two Services were working well for the people of Staffordshire. Cllr Adams and Cllr Deaville also paid tribute to the Panel for the robust way in which they challenged the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire.

Cllr Hood spoke about crime levels in Stone and the need for additional Police Officers on the beat. Cllr Lawson also enquired as to how many new Police Officers had been recruited in the Staffordshire Moorlands area. Cllr Smith referred to an issue in his area whereby 999 calls were directed to the West Midlands Police Force rather than

Staffordshire and indicated that he had raised this issue with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. In response, Cllr Sweeney indicated that the next meeting of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel was due to take place on 26 October and if Member had a question for the Commissioner they could attend the meeting or submit the question in writing to the Chairman of the Panel.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

23. Questions

Cllr Clarke asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Seven years ago, Amey started to identify and to monitor 186,000 drains and gullies across Staffordshire, the purpose was to bring about a schedule which would allow drains to be cleaned, either once every one, two or three years. It would also identify drains which are in need of repair or need to be replaced, again this would enable the County Council to plan a maintenance schedule over a long-term period.

All this information should now be in place. Would the Cabinet Member get Amey to distribute this information to all Councillors, so that we get a clear picture of the issues in our divisions, and allow us to work with Amey to meet the above objectives?

Reply

The routine gully cleansing programme is now available on the Members portal. This allows Members to see how often the gullies in their division are emptied and when the next planned visit is due.

The data collected as part of setting up this system shows that around 5%, or 10,000, of our highway gullies have been identified as needing repair – for example to loosen jammed lids or replace collapsed brickwork.

As part of the recently announced £2.0m in-year investment into Community Highway and Rights of Way priorities around £1m has been allocated towards these kinds of local gully hotspot repairs.

Local Members have been asked to work with their local Highway Officers to help identify and prioritise those requiring the most urgent attention. A full schedule is currently being compiled. This will be shared with Members to help track progress of their own priorities.

It is likely that some of these repairs and other investigatory work will also identify issues requiring more substantial work and many of these are also likely to be complicated by the involvement of third-parties like Severn Trent Water (STW), the Environment Agency (EA) or private land-owners. This new schedule of issues will be of further help to local Members in engaging with those third-parties.

Cllr Woodward asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

In June, Government announced a fund to support those in need of food and basic essentials during the Covid19 crisis. In response, the County Council set up its “Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies” in August with a grant from Government of approx £800,000. Of this, £600,000 was allocated to Family Hubs for distribution to families in need via Edenred food vouchers, each voucher being worth £15. Can the Cabinet Member tell me please how many vouchers have currently been allocated to Staffordshire families in each of our Districts?

Reply

Defra announced the Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Emergency Supplies. This grant was made available from 05 August 2020 to support all residents of Staffordshire who may require support. This includes families, individuals and those asked to self-isolate due to COVID-19 with limited alternatives to access food and emergency supplies.

The grant made it clear that the Local Authorities (LA) had discretion on how we identify those most in need. As a result, we have used a broad definition to include those entitled to benefits or those who people identified in immediate need of help and those who are struggling to afford food and essentials due to COVID-19.

The grant suggested that LA’s should consider using cash or vouchers where practical as this may reduce pressure on your local partners. It also allows people the flexibility to get the food items that they most need.

In addition, the grant seeks to ensure that we provide information to people to help them access longer term support they might need, such as benefits and community support.

The government did anticipate that most of the funding will be spent within 12 weeks. However, in Staffordshire we were keen to ensure that funds were available to allow for flexibility to use as slightly longer-term support.

The amount allocated for the Family Hubs was £600,000 for food and emergency supplies. In total 1287 Vouchers in total have been issued (as of 05.10.20), more detail is provided below:

District	Total Vouchers Issued
Cannock	122
East Staffordshire	134

Lichfield	205
Newcastle	210
South Staffordshire	75
Stafford	207
Staffordshire Moorlands	208
Tamworth	126
Total	1287

There has been an increase in the number of referrals in the last 2 weeks which has seen the distribution of these vouchers double within this time and we continue to seek members support to promote this scheme to local residents who may need assistance.

The information on how to access this support is available here <https://www.staffordshireconnects.info/kb5/staffordshire/directory/service.page?id=X8GSyOF0ADQ>

Supplementary Question

Can the Cabinet Member consider changing the messaging around the availability of vouchers so that more people can access this valuable resource?

Reply

Yes, I certainly will.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

I am grateful to the Cabinet Member for the interest he has shown in the Kniveden Partnership, The Mount, Leek. I recognise that the site owned by the County Council is to be developed for housing but could he clarify whether:

- The site has been sold;
- The North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust has been asked to vacate the site;
- NSCHNT has yet indicated what their intentions are for the future of this vital mental health service at the present site or elsewhere in the area;
- A formal agreement is to be put in place between the County Council and NSCHNT to allow the service to be reopened on the site before it is redeveloped for housing?

Reply

In response to your points above:

- **The site has been sold.** No, the site is earmarked for sale as part of the Council's estates' strategy, but we do not expect to sell it imminently. If and when the Kniveden site is sold we have offered to assist NSCHT with finding alternative local options for their service users; we would also provide support should they wish to continue to operate their service at a different location in the area.
- **The North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust has been asked to vacate the site.** No, we have not asked NSCHT to vacate the site.
- **NSCHNT has yet indicated what their intentions are for the future of this vital mental health service at the present site or elsewhere in the area.** No, NSCHT have yet to indicate whether they intend to continue to provide the service.
- **A formal agreement is to be put in place between the County Council and NSCHNT to allow the service to be reopened on the site before it is redeveloped for housing?** Yes, the Council has asked that that if NSCHT wish to continue to use the Kniveden site then we enter into a formal arrangement in order to give us appropriate cover for insurance purposes. The Council has not indicated that we would charge rent and have no intention of doing so.

Supplementary Question

Would the Cabinet Member help encourage the North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust to facilitate the return to the Kniveden Partnership site as soon as possible so as to alleviate the distress of its sixty clients?

Reply

I will write to Peter Axon and ask him if he will reopen the site and get the relevant manager to sign it off as Covid compliant.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

The Covid-19 pandemic will have impacted on the provision of school crossing patrols.

So:

- How many vacancies are there now for school crossing patrols and at which schools;
- How many school crossing patrols have left the service in the year since September 2019;
- How many have been recruited since September 2019;
- When was the last review of the school crossing patrol service;
- During that review, which schools were added to the list of schools requiring a school crossing patrol and which were removed?

Reply

Vacancies

There are currently 29 vacancies out of 240 positions countywide, that's a vacancy factor of around 12%. This changes frequently and some of the vacancies are long standing and hard to recruit to.

[Details available in Appendix 1]

Recruitment

Since September 2019 approximately 34 patrols have left or retired and 40 have been recruited.

Review

The last full service review was carried out towards the end of 2018. No new schools were added or removed from the service.

Appendix 1 – School Crossing Patrol (SCP) vacancies – 5/10/2020

Newcastle and Moorlands

Pepper Street, Silverdale
Priory Road / Abbot's Way Newcastle
High St. Wolstanton, by the Post Office
Galleys Bank, Kidsgrove
High St Maybank jct Upper Marsh (Zebra)
Old Rd/New Rd, Audley
Knutton Lane / Ashfields New Road, Newcastle
Dimsdale Parade/Hassam Parade/Clare Ave
Newcastle Rd/Crewe Rd - by Madeley Heath War Memorial
Leek Road, Endon
Clayton Lane, Clayton High School, Newcastle
Chapel Lane, Harriseahead
Alexandra Road, Wolstanton
The Avenue Kidsgrove (By zebra/Library)
Gloucester Avenue, Kidsgrove
Station Rd, Barlaston

Cannock, Rugeley and South Staffordshire

Wolgarston Way/Cannock Rd, Penkridge
The Parkway/Gainsborough Dr, Perton
School Rd, Wombourne
Hazelslade Primary
Chillington Drive, Codsall

Stafford, Burntwood & Lichfield

Great Haywood, Stafford
Cheadle

Burton-upon-Trent, Uttoxeter & Tamworth

Branston Road/All Saints Road, Burton-upon-Trent
Clarence St/Queen St, Burton-upon-Trent
Church Hill St/Eldon St, Winshill
Wetmore Road, Burton on Trent
Station Road, Barton Under Needwood
Main St, Yoxall

Supplementary Question

How can schools which desperately need a school crossing patrol make their representations heard and understood as the reviews are so irregular?

Reply

I am not aware of any schools approaching the County Council regarding requests for additional school crossing patrols. Reviews are undertaken every two years, however, if Cllr Atkins wishes to make representations on behalf of a school I would be happy to listen to her.

Cllr Brookes asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

I noted the announcement regarding the Leader of Solihull welcoming the massive funding from the Staffordshire apprentice scheme of £250k. Why wasn't this money raised in Staffordshire spent to help our residents from this fund?

Reply

The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced by government in April 2017 and focuses on large employers with a wage bill of over £3m per annum. The levy takes 0.5% of the wage bill and places it into a digital account that can only be used to fund apprenticeship training.

It is right that we are focussed on growing apprenticeships nationally, however the rules that apply to the scheme mean there are challenges for organisations in spending all their levy. Despite the challenges Staffordshire as a place is currently performing above the national averages, especially in supporting apprenticeships for young people.

Part of the management of the levy allows organisations to spend (also known as "gift") up to 25% on funding apprenticeships in their supply chain or local economy. Staffordshire County Council has been successfully funding external apprenticeships in partner organisations that deliver our priorities and through local businesses. We also joined up with councils from across the West Midlands to jointly promote the initiative to Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's) across the region. The benefit of this approach being efficiencies of scale in terms of marketing and administration.

Another benefit is that there are other private businesses in the partnership and if any council uses its full allocation the private businesses are asked if they will fund additional applications which means we get more funding to use in the area if we need it.

Within the partnership it is a rule that each local authority uses its own allocation for its own businesses and residents. All of Staffordshire's £250,000 that has been allocated through the partnership has gone to Staffordshire businesses and residents to help them in recruiting apprentices or in developing existing staff.

Supplementary Question

Who is responsible for ensuring that we get best value in Staffordshire from the Apprenticeship Levy?

Reply

I can assure Cllr Brookes that every single penny raised from the Levy in Staffordshire has been spent on supporting businesses within that area.

Cllr Woodward asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

I have a question from Steve in Burntwood. He wants me to ask - "When white paint is put around a pothole on a footpath trip hazard of broken slabs, does it mean that it will be repaired within the next two or three years?". What can I tell Steve?

Reply

The condition of roads and pavements, together with the speed and quality of repairs remains a top issue locally and nationally. This has been partially dealt with through the £5m/year investment made by the Council since 2017 to reduce the backlog of defects and the recent additional in-year investment of £14.284m made by Central Government. In the coming months Cabinet will also be considering the medium and long-term funding needs of our highway assets.

All highway defects, including broken paving slabs, are identified from a combination of our own routine safety inspections or customer defect reports. And repairs are prioritised in accordance with the level of risk they present to public safety or property damage.

The latest performance monitoring shows that despite the recent difficult weather conditions:

- over 90% of the most urgent emergency and category 1 defects have been repaired within 24-hours; and
- 92% of other high-risk category 2 defects have been repaired within 7-days.

Lower risk defects do of course take longer, but local Members also have the discretion of using their local Member funding or other funding contributions to accelerate the speed of repairs where necessary.

The use of spray markings does not have any bearing on the level of urgency or timescale of the repair. They are just used in some occasions to help identify the location or show the extent and quantify the amount of work for planning purposes.

Supplementary Question

Is it the case that the white lines painted around road defects really are just a cosmetic exercise giving false hope to people that work is going to take place quickly but doesn't?

Reply

There is no difference between a white line around a category three defect and one around a category one defect. The white lines mean that the defect has been recorded and categorised.

Cllr Robinson asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

What direct representations has the County Council leadership made to the Government to request urgent commitment to ensuring free school meals are provided for eligible pupils throughout this year's autumn half term and Christmas school holidays?

Reply

Senior officers within the County Council have requested ongoing national support for those eligible for free school meals whilst the country remains in the current status of alert. This includes holiday periods including the October half term and Christmas. We are currently awaiting a response from the DfE. We are making arrangements for the 'family hubs' to provide support for families in an emergency should there be no additional support from government.

Supplementary Question

Will the Cabinet Member let Members have sight of any written representations which have been made to the Government on this issue?

Reply

I will check whether I am able to provide that information for you. I also intend to write to the Secretary of State this afternoon on this issue.

24. Petitions

Brookes indicated that he was in receipt of two petitions from local residents in respect of speeding in Uttoxeter.

Chairman