

## Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 19 March 2020

Present:

<b>Attendance</b>		
Ben Adams	John Francis	Kyle Robinson
Charlotte Atkins	Colin Greatorex	Mark Sutton
Philip Atkins, OBE	Phil Hewitt	Stephen Sweeney
David Brookes	Jill Hood	Simon Tagg
Tina Clements	Julia Jessel	Carolyn Trowbridge
John Cooper	Bryan Jones	Ross Ward
Mike Davies	Jason Jones	Alan White
Mark Deaville	Paul Northcott	Philip White
Alan Dudson	Jeremy Oates	David Williams
Helen Fisher	Ian Parry	Mark Winnington
Keith Flunder	Jeremy Pert	Susan Woodward
Richard Ford	Jonathan Price	

Apologies for absence: Ann Beech, Gill Burnett, Ron Clarke, Maureen Compton, Derek Davis, OBE, Janet Eagland, Ann Edgeller, Gill Heath, Syed Hussain, Keith James, Trevor Johnson, Dave Jones, Ian Lawson, Alastair Little, Johnny McMahon, Kath Perry MBE, Bernard Peters, Natasha Pullen, David Smith, Paul Snape, Bob Spencer, Mike Sutherland, Martyn Tittley, Conor Wileman, Bernard Williams, Victoria Wilson and Mike Worthington.

### **PART ONE**

#### **50. Appointment of Chairman**

Mr Atkins moved, Mrs Atkins seconded, and it was:

**RESOLVED** – That, in the absence of both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the County Council, Mr Parry be appointed as Chairman for the Meeting.

#### **51. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16**

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

<b>Member</b>	<b>Minute Nos.</b>	<b>Interest</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Mark Winnington	56	Personal	Chairman of West Midlands Rail
Ben Adams	57	Personal	Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Candidate
Susan Woodward	59	Personal	Resident of Ironstone Road, Chase Terrace

## **52. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 February 2020**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 13 February 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

## **53. Chairman's Correspondence**

There were no items of Chairman's Correspondence on this occasion.

## **54. Statement of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council. In introducing his statement, the Leader also informed the Council of the following additional matters:

### **Committee and other Member Meetings during the Coronavirus Pandemic**

"In order to make sure we are following the Government's advice, I am reviewing which meetings we need and which we can manage without over the coming months. What I am proposing is that:

We categorise our meetings into essential, desirable and non-essential:

- The essential meetings (Cabinet, Property Sub and Full Council) will continue to meet unless cancelled by the Leader or Chair due to lack of essential and urgent business.
- The desirable meetings (which includes our Scrutiny committees) will only meet where the Chair considers it necessary in order to conduct essential and urgent business.
- The non-essential meetings (Schools Forum, SACRE etc) will be postponed until further notice.
- We will run our meetings with bare quorums, and no Member will be expected to attend if they fall into the 3 vulnerable categories.

I am sure Members will understand the need for these changes in the current circumstances, and I will obviously keep the arrangements under review in light of emerging government advice and I will consult with the Opposition as appropriate."

### **Coronavirus COVID-19**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing also made a statement on the Covid-19 Pandemic and the County Council's and Central Government's response thereto, a copy of which is attached as Annex A to the minutes.

Mrs Atkins thanked the Deputy Leader for his statement and said that this was an unprecedented national crisis during peace time. She enquired as to how long people could be expected to self-isolate to keep themselves safe; how the Council could ensure that the efforts of the volunteer groups which were springing-up were not duplicated? She also expressed the hope that the County Council would work closely with the

borough and district councils to tackle the issues which arose and that the lessons learnt could be utilised to help communities in Staffordshire in the future, for example, through different ways of working.

### **Staffordshire Library Service 2020-2025**

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward referred to the cleaning contracts for the Council's community managed libraries and expressed the concern that, although members of the controlling group had been briefed on the arrangements, that information had not be shared with members of the opposition group. She requested that opposition members be kept informed when changes to services were to take place. She also enquired as to what measures were being put in place to monitor the performance of the contractor. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that County Council staff would be working with the volunteers in the community managed libraries to ensure that the services provided by the contractor were to an appropriate standard.

### **Integrated Performance Report 2019/20 - Quarter 3**

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins enquired as to what assessment had been made into the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the financial health of the County Council and whether Central Government would indemnify the Council in respect of additional costs incurred by the Authority in helping to resolve the crisis. In response, Mr Alan White indicated that, as part of its planning to respond to the pandemic, the Council was assessing the financial impact on the Authority and would be having the appropriate discussions with Central Government. He added that this was a fast moving and evolving situation and would be factored into the Council's MTFS.

### **Coronavirus**

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Mrs Hood asked the Deputy Leader whether he was confident that the County Council had the necessary resources to support and safeguard the County's vulnerable children during the pandemic.

Mrs Woodward indicated that although social media often contained miss-information, it was also necessary to look at the positives such as the recent offers of support and offers of help for those people in need; individuals being able to keep in touch with families and friends through platforms such as "WhatsApp". She added that she had been massively encouraged and heartened by the recent gestures of good will and through the setting up of new local volunteering groups. She concluded by indicating that it was time for everyone to be creative and think about ways to help their communities without compromising their safety.

Mr Philip White referred to the closure of schools and informed Members that national guidance had been issued to them regarding support for vulnerable children and also looking after the children of "key" workers. He added that, with regard to the announcement that this year's GCSE examinations were to be cancelled, this was obviously a worrying time for those pupils who were due to submit the examinations. Mr

Alan White added that discussions were also to take place with the Schools' Commissioner to ensure that "Key" workers could continue to carry out their vital roles

Mr Tagg assured Members that the County Council and the Borough and District Councils in Staffordshire were working closely together to tackle the issues arising from the pandemic and ensure the continuity of services where possible.

Mrs Trowbridge referred to the Council's "I Count" initiative for staff and enquired as to whether Members could also volunteer. She also referred to the initiative she was setting up in her Division to help those who were vulnerable and/or self-isolating and she encouraged other members to consider setting up a similar initiative in their area.

Mr Winnington referred to the important role played by the Council's Superfast Broadband initiative in helping to ensure that people could keep in touch with families and friends and in enabling them to work from home.

Mr Robinson expressed his thanks to the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council for their briefing on the response to Covid-19 and stated that it was important that the Council showed leadership at this difficult time. He also indicated that, like Mrs Woodward, he had been moved by the "army" of volunteers who had been putting themselves forward to support the elderly and vulnerable in their respective communities. Mr Robinson added that he was extremely disappointed by the actions of some individuals who had exhibited selfish behaviour through panic buying/stockpiling, making it difficult for the elderly especially, to get basic food supplies such as bread and eggs. He indicated that the message needed to get out to the public that there was absolutely no need to panic buy and that, if everybody acted responsibly, the measures put in place by the Supermarkets would ensure that shelves were kept stocked. Mr Robinson also referred to the potential impact of decisions to close local facilities such as Day Centres and how this could put additional pressures on families. He stated that, before such decisions were taken, careful consideration needed to be taken of the potential impact.

Mr Bryan Jones, Mr Deaville and Mr Atkins praised the work of the Council and, in particular, its Incident Management Team, in its continuing efforts to deal with the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic. Mr Deaville added that the Council was working closely with the Emergency Services to ensure a combined and co-ordinated response. Mr Bryan Jones also referred to the important role played by Support Staffordshire and the Council's Cabinet Community Support Members in supporting Staffordshire's communities. Mr Ward added that Parish and Town Council's also had a vital role to play at the grass roots level.

Mr Brookes spoke about the potential impact of the pandemic on the farming community.

Mr Alan White informed Members that the County Council was setting up a helpline for self-isolators to call when in need and that links were being established with the voluntary sector to assist in providing the necessary assistance to those calling the helpline. He added that the Council was looking to recruit students and others to bolster the Home Care workforce.

Mr White also explained that, in accordance with Government guidance, most day care facilities would be closed in order to reduce social contact and the spread of the virus amongst vulnerable people. He added that a vaccine was being worked on; that promising progress was being made; and that clinical trials had recently commenced but it was likely that it would be ready for deployment before the Spring of 2021.

Mr Atkins stated that it was important that the public listen and adhere to the Government advice which was being issued and that they should try to stay calm. He added that the County Council remained open for business and that staff would be redeployed where necessary to continue to ensure the provision of essential services. Mr Atkins added that the funding made available to Members to support their local communities would continue in 2020/21 but would be refocused to assist in the recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

### **School Places**

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward welcomed the news that, in Staffordshire, 90% of parents had been allocated a place at their first choice of Secondary school for their child. She enquired that, with regard to the 10% who had not been given a place at their first choice of Secondary School, which areas of the County were the most affected. In response, Mr Philip White indicated that 97% of parents had been allocated a place in one of their top three choice of Secondary Schools for their child and that he would write to Mrs Woodward with regard to those areas where there had been an excess of demand, but this tended to be for those schools which were rated as “excellent”.

### **New Recycling Campaign**

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Mr Robinson stated that he welcomed the Council’s “Plastic Bottles: Recycle One and All” campaign and asked the Cabinet Member if he agreed that more could be done by businesses to recycle waste rather than send it to landfill. In response, Mr Deaville stated that, although businesses tended to adopt a responsible approach to the disposal of waste, improvements could be made the County Council needed to do more to work with them to improve recycling rates.

### **Budget**

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins asked the Deputy Leader whether he shared her concern that, in every crisis, the Government goes into overdrive with regard to the funding for the NHS but forgets about social care and the role it plays in freeing-up hospital beds. In response, Mr Alan White indicated that finding a solution to the long-term funding of social care had been overtaken by recent events and that the Council was doing everything it could to help to ensure that people were transferred out of hospital as soon as it was safe and possible to do so. Mr Atkins added that, in the short-term, it was important that the County Council had the necessary additional financial resources to deal with the cost of responding to the Coronavirus pandemic. In the longer-term, a solution to the funding of social care needed to be found.

Mr Brookes expressed his disappointment that Project B on the A50 in Uttoxeter had not been allocated the necessary funding from Central Government. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that more work needed to be done to make the case for improvement scheme.

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

## **55. Recommendations to the Council**

### **(a) Pay Policy Statement 2020/21 - Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011**

The Council were informed that it was a legal requirement of the Localism Act 2011 for the County Council to have a Pay Policy statement which must be published annually before 31 March.

Mrs Woodward referred to the lease car subsidy available to some senior officers as part of their contract of employment and enquired as to whether there had been any consideration as to the environmental impacts of the policy and whether all officers who were eligible claimed the subsidy. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that he did not have the detailed information to hand and would therefore respond to Mrs Woodward in writing and would ensure that all Members of the Council received a copy of the response.

**RESOLVED** – That the Pay Policy Statement for 2020/21 (as set out in Annex A to the report) be approved.

**Note by Clerk:** Mr Dudson abstained from voting on the recommendation.

### **(b) Members' Allowances Scheme - Independent Remuneration Panel Report**

Members were informed that the County Council was required to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to provide advice and recommendations to the Council on its Members' Allowances Scheme. Any decisions on the nature and level of allowances were a matter for the Full Council, but the Council must have regard to any recommendations submitted by the Independent Remuneration Panel before establishing or amending the Members' Allowances Scheme. The Panel met annually to consider the recommendations to be made to the Council in respect of the level and nature of the forthcoming year's allowances.

As part of their deliberations this year, the Panel proposed that, in line with normal practice, Members' Allowances be increased by 2% in line with the employee pay award for 2019-20. The Panel also expressed the view that the Planning Committee Chairman's Special Responsibility Allowance should remain at the same relative level, providing that they were also the Chairman of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel. The Panel did not propose any other changes to the Members' Allowances Scheme.

Mr Dudson expressed the view that the workload of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel was such that it should be treated as a separate Committee of the Council and not as a "sub-committee" of the Planning Committee. In response, Mr Atkins suggested that Mr Dudson should write to the Independent Remuneration Panel setting out his views

Mrs Atkins referred to the remuneration paid to Community Cabinet Support Members and expressed that, some were proactive and performed well and others less so. She enquired as to how the Leader of the Council intended to ensure that there was a more consistent approach to the role and how their effectiveness would be assessed. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that a new job description/specification was being prepared for the role with clear guidelines on the approach to be adopted.

Mrs Trowbridge extended her thanks to the members of the Independent Remuneration Panel for the robust manner in which they had conducted their investigations and for the recommendations they had made. Mr Atkins also extended his thanks to the Members of the Panel.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the Council’s thanks be extended to the Independent Remuneration Panel for their report.

(b) That the recommendations contained in the Independent Remuneration Panel’s Report be agreed.

**Note by Clerk:** Mr Dudson abstained from voting on the recommendations.

## **56. Notices of Motion**

Mr Atkins moved, and Mr Winnington seconded, the following motion:

“Now that the Prime Minister has given the go ahead for HS2, at the very least this brings an end to years of uncertainty for our communities.

From the outset as a county council, while opposing HS2, we have been committed to getting the best deal for Staffordshire if HS2 gained Parliamentary approval, and our resolve to achieve this remains as strong and as firm as ever.

Therefore, this council moves that we now:

- (i) Work constructively with the Government and HS2 Ltd to mitigate the impact on Staffordshire, our communities and our diverse natural landscape.
- (ii) Welcome the appointment of a new dedicated HS2 Minister.
- (iii) Ensure that Staffordshire shares in any economic benefits from HS2.
- (iv) Ensure that Staffordshire benefits from improved connectivity and access to HS2 including compatible trains via Stafford.
- (v) Continue to work closely with our strategic transport partners to ensure that Staffordshire benefits from an integrated approach to connectivity across the region.”

Mr Atkins indicated that this was the third Notice of Motion brought to the Council in respect of HS2 and would enable the Council to talk to HS2 to get the best mitigation possible for the communities which would be affected.

Mrs Atkins stated that the County Council had no alternative but to work with the Government on HS2 and that it would be years before HS2 would bring any economic benefits to the West Midlands and the North of England. She added that there were a number of other projects which were “shovel ready” which would improve local commuter routes, remove bottlenecks and make a real difference to the local economy. However, such schemes were likely to be starved of cash due to the imperative to proceed with HS2. She there stressed the need to impress on Government the need to invest in local commuter routes to end the daily misery of commuters.

Mr Pert indicated his support for the motion and expressed his concern at the impact on the local community of the proposed railhead at Yarnfield, particularly during its construction phase which would see 2,500 lorries per day using the local highway network. He urged the Council to lend its support to seeking the relocation of the proposed railhead. Mrs Hood added that she shared the concerns expressed by Mr Pert in relation to the proposed railhead and its impact on Yarnfield, Stone and the surrounding area. She requested that the Council to use its influence with the MP’s representing constituencies in Staffordshire to press for the relocation of the proposed railhead.

Mr Francis indicated his support for the motion and added that he welcomed the news that the Handsacre Junction was to go ahead as this would lead to new employment opportunities in Stafford, Stoke and Crewe. He also indicated that he still believed that the HS2 project was fundamentally flawed and that the funding for the scheme could be better spent on other transport projects.

Mrs Trowbridge also expressed her support for the motion and indicated that she shared the concerns expressed by other members. She added that one positive that had recently arisen was that the Government, through the University of Wolverhampton, had put on free construction courses with the aim of filling the void of skilled workers.

Mr Sweeney confirmed his support for the motion but indicated that he did not agree with the comments of other Members of the Council in relation to the need for lobbying to secure the relocation of the proposed railhead away from Yarnfield to a site near Madeley.

Mr Winnington indicated that, with regard to local commuter services, West Midlands Rail were proposing to improve capacity through the provision of additional carriages and timetable changes. He added that with regard to bottlenecks on the West Coast Main Line, one of the biggest bottlenecks was at Norton Bridge and that work had recently been completed to address this matter.

Mr Atkins added that the County Council would continue to make available the necessary support communities to enable them to “make their case” in respect of concerns in relation to HS2.

Following a vote it was:

**RESOLVED** – That this Council will:

- (i) Work constructively with the Government and HS2 Ltd to mitigate the impact on Staffordshire, our communities and our diverse natural landscape.
- (ii) Welcome the appointment of a new dedicated HS2 Minister.
- (iii) Ensure that Staffordshire shares in any economic benefits from HS2.
- (iv) Ensure that Staffordshire benefits from improved connectivity and access to HS2 including compatible trains via Stafford.
- (v) Continue to work closely with our strategic transport partners to ensure that Staffordshire benefits from an integrated approach to connectivity across the region.

**Note by Clerk:** Mrs Hood abstained from voting on the motion.

#### **57. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel**

Mr Adams suggested that the Council should offer its support to the Emergency Services in respect of the additional pressures on them as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Mrs Woodward urged Members to respond to the current consultation document on “Have your say” on the future direction of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on Trent Fire and Rescue Service.

**RESOLVED** – That the report be received.

#### **58. Questions**

Mrs Woodward asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

##### **Question**

Following the County Council’s recent social media campaign recognising the ‘inspirational’ contributions of women to life in Staffordshire, will the Leader now commit to ensuring that the default form of address for all members, male and female, is the title ‘Councillor plus surname’ rather than the discriminatory use of ‘Mr’ for male councillors and ‘Miss, Mrs or Ms’ for female councillors?

##### **Reply**

I applaud the inspirational contributions of women to society and life in Staffordshire.

The proper title is County Councillor not Councillor.

On your election ballot paper, you can choose how you are known.

When officers are contacted by members of the public calling themselves councillor, to avoid confusion with parish and district councillors, a convention of preferred title or first name was adopted.

So, I would refer to myself as Philip Atkins, County Councillor for Uttoxeter Rural, and might be addressed in return as Mr Atkins or county councillor in any reply by an officer, as they may feel uncomfortable in addressing me by my first name.

This also avoids confusion where members have the same name, with for example County Councillor Charlotte Atkins

### **Supplementary Question**

I think the use of the term “Councillor” would be more formal and appropriate in this Chamber. When is the Leader going to consider the wishes of Members who do not wish to be referred to as Ms, Miss or Mrs?

### **Reply**

I refer to my written answer.

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

### **Question**

What plans does the County Council have to increase per - pupil funding to special schools in line with the increase in mainstream school funding?

### **Reply**

In 2020/21 special school budgets have been set in line with rises recently approved for all maintained schools next year, i.e. an increase in the underlying lump sum factor to £114,000 (up from £90,000 in 2019/20), a minimum funding guarantee of 1.84% (significantly higher than the MFG set by Government of 0%) and no capping of gains.

As Government set the amount for planned places, any increase providers receive will be through the top up rates and, in particular, the specific School Adjustment Rate to ensure that, on a like for like basis, all schools receive an overall funding increase next year of at least 1.84% (note: the average increase in school funding is estimated to be around 2.3%). Individual school budgets for 2020/21 were confirmed at the end of February and will be regularly updated going forward to reflect changes in the school roll arising throughout the year.

### **Supplementary Question**

I'm being told by Special Schools that they are not effectively getting an increase in their budgets. There appears to be some confusion over this and there obviously needs to be clarification. I'd be grateful if you could clarify the confusion?

### **Reply**

I have responded to the Head of a Special School with a more detailed briefing. I will copy that briefing to all Members. If, following that, there needs to be more clarification, I am happy to arrange a more detailed briefing from an officer from Finance.

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

### **Question**

What plans does County Highways have to address residents' concerns about the state of the pavements in Westwood Park Drive, Leek?

### **Reply**

In recent years over half a million pounds has been invested in replacing kerbs and reconstructing footways in the Westwood Park area of Leek. However, it is recognised that there are further footways in the area that are life expired and require reconstruction. These remain on our forward programme, alongside many other similar needs across the County, for prioritisation in accordance with our Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan and the level of funding available.

In the meantime, these locations will continue to benefit from routine safety Inspections and any dangerous defects attended to so that the footways remain safe for use. And of course, you have the option as a local member to spend your own Highways Funding on these issues.

### **Supplementary Question**

The complainant was particularly aggrieved when Amey came along and repaired the area which was "least bad" but failed to rectify the "worse bad". This is a trip hazard and residents are disappointed that the matter has not been resolved. Can I urge the Cabinet Member to ensure that the remedial works to the rest of Westwood Park Drive are completed as a matter of urgency?

### **Reply**

I am aware that more needs to be done in your Division and I believe that you have spent your DHP for this year in another area. DHP funding will again be available this coming year. I don't think you are alone in that we all have works to be done in our respective Divisions. However, we do have plans to spend money on footpaths this coming year and I'll have more information on that in the coming weeks.

Mr Robinson asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

### **Question**

Community First Responders are volunteers who support the work of West Midlands Ambulance Service and provide vital assistance to those in need of emergency care. In 95% of cases in Staffordshire, First Responders arrive at the location of a call out before an ambulance; and are then able to provide primary first aid at the most important time in an emergency.

The proposal, from the Ambulance Service, to prevent the highly trained Enhanced Community First Responders from using emergency blue lights and from carrying essential drugs in our County is utter folly, particularly when there is no legislation which requires this to be the case. In other authority areas, where CFRs are unable to use blue lights, they arrive first to an emergency in as few as 70% of cases, meaning that if these proposals were to be adopted up to 25% of ambulance call outs in Staffordshire might see a delay in the provision of vital, emergency care.

Will the Leader of the Council agree to write to the CEO of West Midlands Ambulance Service to express concern and to ask that he reconsiders this proposal in order that Enhanced Community First Responders are able to continue to operate in the same way and to help prevent unnecessary delays in emergency care?

### **Reply**

The Council recognises the valuable work of the Enhanced Community First Responders and I would be very happy to write to the CEO of West Midlands Ambulance Service to clarify the position in respect of blue lights and ensure that Enhanced Community First Responders have the support they need to operate effectively.

### **Supplementary Question**

Since submitting the question, I've been made aware of a briefing released by the West Midlands Ambulance Service which suggests that the legislation changes they refer to goes back to the Road Traffic Act 2006. It is now 2020 and things have changed significantly, and our Health Service is in a very different place, facing many more pressures. Enhanced Community First Responders have become a more integral part of providing services to people, especially in parts of rural Staffordshire. Does the Leader agree with me that these issues have to be looked at again?

### **Reply**

Yes, this is a living situation which requires continual monitoring.

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

### **Question**

Staffordshire County Council may receive a large amount of Government funding in the near future to reinstate bus services in Staffordshire that were previously cut due to austerity. How can elected members have more of an input to decide where this new funding will be prioritised and spent in their divisions to help improve public transport?

### **Reply**

The county council are required to submit a statement of intent to Department for Transport in order to release the funds (£583,372 for Staffordshire). As the amount is a one-off payment and we are conscious that the funds should be used both fairly and in a way that maximises the likelihood of the services that are funded continuing beyond the period of funding, we propose that the funds are spent over 2 years and in the main are spent on reinstating Sunday services across the county. This recommendation takes account of feedback from the detailed consultation undertaken during the review of local services 2 years ago.

As required by DfT, all MPs and bus operators have been consulted on our recommended approach, and feedback and support to date has been overwhelmingly positive.

As the deadlines were extremely tight, it was not possible to consult all members. However, in light of the recent developments concerning the pandemic, some timescales may change.

### **Supplementary Question**

If we can find time to consult Members of Parliament, who are not members of this Authority, but not consult Members of this Authority, it is not good enough. In future, we need to ensure that members of this Authority are consulted.

### **Reply**

I do appreciate that the deadlines were extremely tight and I am happy to share with all Members what we sent out to the MPs.

Mrs Woodward asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities whose reply is set out below the question:-

### **Question**

I welcome the fact that Staffordshire County Council does not allow hunting with dogs on land in its ownership and management. Is the Council aware of any infringements of this ban in recent years?

### **Reply**

You're correct – hunting with dogs on land the County Council owns or manages is not something we allow, and I'm not aware of any infringements in recent years.

### **Supplementary Question**

It's a little vague at the end of the response where it says that "I'm not aware of any infringements in recent years". How long ago does that relate to?

### **Reply**

I do not have that information to hand and will therefore respond to you in writing.

### **59. Petitions**

#### **Flooding in Ironstone Road, Chase Terrace**

Mrs Woodward presented a petition from residents of Ironstone Road, Chase Terrace, requesting the Council to find an effective long-term solution to the flooding issues between the road's junctions with Biddulph Park and Kingsdown Road.

**Chairman**

## Coronavirus COVID-19

### Background

- 1) In December 2019 we began to hear reports of a new coronavirus that had emerged in the city of Wuhan in China. Coronaviruses are common: they are one of the viruses that cause the common cold. This new virus appears to cause more serious illness, especially in the elderly and people with underlying medical conditions. The illness has been named COVID-19.
- 2) It spreads via the respiratory route. Infected people produce droplets when they cough or sneeze, these can be breathed in by others who are in close proximity, or contaminate surfaces and then be picked up on others hands and transferred to the mouth, nose and eyes. As it is a new virus, no-one is immune and everyone is susceptible. It has already spread to 146 countries around the world.
- 3) There are over 200,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 7,500 deaths globally. In the UK there are over 2,000 confirmed cases and 100 deaths, including 10 confirmed cases in Staffordshire. The number of cases is increasing day by day. Note that in addition to the confirmed cases there will be many more cases that will not have been diagnosed.
- 4) The government is planning for a 'worst case' scenario under which 80% of the population contracts the coronavirus over the next few months. Of these about half would have no symptoms and the majority would have a mild illness.
- 5) However a significant proportion might require hospitalisation, and up to 1% might die, with the risk of complications and death highest in the elderly and people with underlying medical conditions. We are still learning about the virus so whilst we are planning for the 'worst case' scenario we don't know for sure how many cases there will be.

### UK response

- 6) The government has developed a coronavirus COVID-19 action plan which includes three phases, contain, delay and mitigate, with research throughout to learn more about the virus. We are currently in the delay phase. The aim is to push cases into the summer months and distribute them over a longer period to reduce the pressure on NHS, social care services and wider society.
- 7) To achieve this the government is rolling out a series of control measures to create 'social distancing: reducing contact between infected people and the rest of the population, and especially between infected people and the elderly and people with underlying medical conditions.
- 8) People with symptoms of COVID-19 are being asked to stay at home and self-isolate for seven days. The main symptoms are a new, persistent cough and/or a

fever above 37.8C. If they live with other people then the whole household is being asked to stay at home for 14 days.

- 9) Everyone else is asked to stop all non-essential contact. This includes working from home where possible, not going to pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, not using public transport unless absolutely necessary, and avoiding gatherings with friends and family.
- 10) This advice is particularly important for people over 70 and people with underlying medical conditions. In addition they are asked to stay at home and limit face-to-face interaction with friends and family for 12 weeks.
- 11) Emergency services support for mass gatherings has been withdrawn and it is likely therefore that organisers will need to cancel large events.

### **Staffordshire response**

- 12) The County Council has stood up an Incident Management Team to co-ordinate our response. The wider public sector has also convened a Strategic Co-ordinating Group to co-ordinate multi-agency actions.
- 13) At the moment we are focusing on:
  - a. Keeping the public and other agencies informed.
  - b. Making sure we have plans in place to maintain critical services during a period of staff absence due to sickness and the government's control measures.
  - c. In particular planning to maintain social care services as far as possible to support the local NHS.
  - d. Planning how we support local businesses and keep the economy going in the face of disruption from sickness and the government's control measures.
  - e. Managing individual cases and incidents as they arise.
- 14) We are providing advice and direction to Council staff about who can work from home, and encouraging hand washing and 'social distancing' for those who are required to come into the workplace.
- 15) In order to free up staff to maintain critical services and to implement 'social distancing' we will start to suspend some services. These include day services, libraries, educational residential centres, children's centres, and school crossing patrols.
- 16) We have launched the I Count campaign to encourage staff working in non-critical roles to volunteer to switch to supporting the Council and our residents in critical services such as care or children's services.
- 17) We may start to find that some of our normal business activities, for example responding to enquiries from residents, are delayed. And if fellow Members have questions of officers it may be worth reflecting on how urgent they are given the current situation.

## How can people help?

- 18) **Wash your hands.** One of most important ways to stop the virus spreading is hand washing regularly for 20 seconds with soap and water, or a hand sanitiser if you are out and about. This is further strengthened by avoiding unnecessary physical contact with others such as hand shaking, and avoiding touching your mouth, nose and eyes. It's particularly important to wash your hands when you arrive at work, when you get home, and before you prepare or eat food.
- 19) **Be prepared to stay at home.** Plan ahead in case they need to self isolate if they have symptoms of COVID-19. Think about what provisions you might need, what activities you might have to cancel, as well as what IT equipment would be useful: it may be possible to work from home if you are feeling well enough.
- 20) **Use health services wisely.** Most people with COVID-19 will have a mild illness, which can be managed at home with over the counter medications such as paracetamol. Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital as you could pass the infection to others. Visit [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus) or call [NHS 111](https://www.nhs.uk/111) if you need to speak to someone. Services like [999](https://www.nhs.uk/999) or [Accident and Emergency](https://www.nhs.uk/emergency) should only be used for genuine emergencies.
- 21) **Stay informed.** Use official information sources such as the government or Council website. There is a lot of misinformation on the internet that could cause unnecessary anxiety or even harm.
- 22) **Help out.** We need people to volunteer to support older and vulnerable people, for example if they are asked to stay at home and self-isolate for a prolonged period.

## Conclusion

- 23) The next few months will be a difficult time for Staffordshire. Some of us will lose loved ones. Some of us will lose livelihoods. But we will get through this.
- 24) The Council has a huge role to play in minimising the impact of COVID-19. The county and the people who living here are looking to each and everyone us for leadership, guidance and reassurance and there has never been important for us to demonstrate this than now.
- 25) I know that our Members and staff will rise to the challenges. We will do everything we can to maintain critical services: social workers will still be visiting at risk families; people will still visit those who need care at home; and we will do everything we can to support care homes to protect their residents. We will also work with government to support local businesses and keep the economy going.
- 26) And I call on everyone else do play their part. This is a time for people to pull together and support each other. To show the best of what Staffordshire can do.