

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 1, 2020-21

The Cabinet have considered an overview of the Council's progress, performance and financial position in delivering against its Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan. They were informed that, at the end of Quarter 1, the overall assessment on the Council's performance and financial position was Amber. Particular areas of risk were in Adult Social Care and Children's and Families. The latest revenue forecast outturn showed a forecast overspend of £10.149m (1.9%). This was mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also due to underlying cost pressures that were evident before the crisis hit.

(Cabinet – 15 July 2020)

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

The Cabinet have approved the procurement process to secure and manage the Framework Agreement for the service and testing of domestic water systems which will commence around 1 September 2020 for up to 4 years. The estimated spend envisaged through this Framework Agreement over 4 years is approximately £2.8 million.

(Cabinet – 15 July 2020)

3. Provision of Apprenticeship Services

The Council has successfully used the Nottingham City Council DAAP (Directory of Approved Apprenticeship Training Providers) as a route to procure apprenticeship training provision since March 2019. In April 2020 Nottingham City Council gave notice that it would not be continuing to manage and operate the DAAP after September 2020, therefore the Council would need to consider other procurement routes from October 2020. The Cabinet have therefore agreed that the Council should join the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation's (ESPO) Apprenticeship Dynamic Purchasing System (ADPS) for the fixed period of 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2024. The ESPO ADPS has similar processes to that of the DAAP and therefore the transition to the ADPS should be straightforward, and the provision of Apprenticeship training is not expected to be disrupted.

The Council's Assistant Director for Skills and Employability has been authorised to approve the award of contracts with training providers through the ESPO ADPS, and the release of funds from the apprenticeship levy to fund training.

The Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability, in discussion with the Assistant Director for Skills and Employability, has also been requested to develop a number of asks of Government to decentralise responsibilities and resources to enable Staffordshire to drive the local skills agenda.

(Cabinet – 15 July 2020)

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

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No.3) Regulations 2020 (The Regulations) came into force on 18th July 2020 and grant upper tier local authorities, such as the County Council, the power to issue directions imposing prohibitions, or restrictions in relation to premises, events, activities or open spaces without needing to apply to the Court. In the most serious of cases, the County Council will have the ability to close business who are deemed to be posing a risk to public health. The Cabinet have 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.

(Cabinet – 19 August 2020)

5. Treasury Management Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2020

The Cabinet have considered the Council's investment and borrowing activity during 2019/20 including both borrowing and investment decisions taken throughout the year in the light of the interest rates and economic conditions prevailing at the time. They noted that the UK economy continued to face an uncertain environment in 2019/20, with Brexit deadline extensions and the Covid-19 pandemic. The County Council retained its Treasury Management Policy of using internal cash balances instead of borrowing money. This has delivered significant savings for taxpayers, as the infrastructure to deliver more skilled, better-paid jobs is being funded at a lower cost.

(Cabinet – 19 August 2020)

6. #DoingOurBit Community Grants Scheme

Encouraging our communities to support each other to remain well and independent is one of the key priorities of the Council and an area that we have invested in. Throughout the pandemic we saw how people and communities came together to support each other. A key priority for recovery from the pandemic is to sustain community capacity to help manage demand. However, we know that the voluntary sector is facing challenges to recover operations and is concerned about their long-term financial stability. The Cabinet have therefore approved a one-off injection of funding of £200k into a Community Grants Scheme. Applications will be encouraged from support groups and organisations that will help meet the needs of our vulnerable and older adults as well as those that will help meet the needs of our vulnerable children and families.

(Cabinet – 16 September 2020)

7. Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board

The Cabinet have received an update from the COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board. They were the number of new confirmed cases in

Staffordshire had risen to around 20 a day and that the Council was managing an increasing number of Incidents related to care providers, educational settings, businesses and communities. There had recently been an outbreak related to the Silverdale Working Men's Club and an ongoing elevated level of infections in parts of Burton.

The Cabinet also noted that there had been a shortfall in national laboratory capacity which meant that it could be very difficult for people in Staffordshire to book a test close to home. It was understood that this may take several weeks before it can be resolved and so the Council was therefore exploring the potential for alternative local testing arrangements. Concerns had also been raised about the completeness and timeliness of contact tracing by the NHS test and trace service with the Department of Health and Social Care. A system had therefore been put in place to mitigate this with the Council tracing some cases and contacts in order to identify common exposures and ensure that they are self-isolating. The Council was also proceeding with a Local Enhanced Contact Tracing pilot to trace those cases and contacts that the national service had been unable to reach.

(Cabinet – 15 July, 19 August and 16 September 2020)

8. Strategic Review of the Older People Care Home Market in Staffordshire 2020

Covid-19 has had a profound impact on the care home market and the Cabinet has therefore reviewed the Council's strategic approach and plans to ensure that they address the ongoing challenges arising from the pandemic. As part of this review, the Cabinet has agreed to:

- Extend the duration of the current Dynamic Purchasing System and overarching agreement with providers until April 2022.
- Pause the intended refurbishment of the Council owned site to provide 38 additional nursing beds within Staffordshire to allow further evaluation of the impact from Covid-19 and associated infection control requirements.
- Continue with the project to explore building two Council owned care homes to provide additional nursing capacity and to review the intended design and delivery models to ensure that they are consistent with enhanced infection control requirements from Covid-19;
- Proceed with the review and update of the long-term demand model for care homes placements, taking into account the impact of Covid-19 and the views of local communities to reflect the needs and expectations of current and future residents.

(Cabinet – 16 September 2020)

9. Recommissioning of Home Care in Staffordshire

The Cabinet have approved the procurement process for the future provision of Home Care as the current contracts are due to expire in August 2021. This process will build on the successes and incorporate the lessons learnt from the previous procurement in 2017/18. The aim is to support the development of home care, increasing supply and encouraging innovation, whilst avoiding large-scale disruption of the market.

(Cabinet – 16 September 2020)

10. Nexxus Trading Services Limited - Annual Report 2019/2020

The cabinet have considered Nexxus Trading Services Limited's annual report which provides an update on the activities and performance of the company. In 2019/20 Nexxus Care generated a small surplus of £46k and the Cabinet have agreed that it should be retained by and within Nexxus Care for reinvestment in the company. This would include further investment in digital systems and other technologies to improve quality and productivity as well as providing a contingency against future one-off or capital investment costs.

(Cabinet – 16 September 2020)

11. Street Lighting – LED Invest to Save Initiative

The Cabinet have given their approval to proceed to the delivery phase of the street lighting LED invest to save initiative as agreed in the 2019/20 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The premise of the invest to save initiative shall see the replacement of street light lanterns not impacted by the delivery requirements of the PFI Project Agreement. To achieve this the Council has negotiated with Lighting for Staffordshire Ltd to commission the appointed service provider, currently E.ON Energy Solutions Limited, to replace over 47,000 lanterns with energy efficient LED lanterns. The project will be delivered over four phases with each phase taking 12 months to complete. Upon completion of all four phases the project will reduce energy consumption by 8,627,502 kWh which equates to a carbon emission reduction of 2,650 tonnes CO₂e and generate energy savings in the region of £1.6m per annum.

(Cabinet – 16 September 2020)

12. Additional Investment in Community Highways Issues

The Cabinet have approved an additional one-off £2m investment in highways and Public Rights of Way (PRoW) services. This will provide for an investment of £1.9m in current local highway priorities which will provide quick-win improvements to issues relating to drainage, verges (including hedges), grass cutting and weeds; and a £0.1m investment in immediate small-scale improvements to the Public Rights of Way network.

(Cabinet – 16 September 2020)

13. Consultation on Proposals for Changes to Marshlands School and Greenhall Nursery

The Cabinet have approved changes at Marshlands School and Greenhall Nursery which seek to maximise the use of the learning environments in both settings. Marshlands School is currently oversubscribed, particularly in Key Stage 2 whereas Greenhall Nursery is undersubscribed. The proposed changes, which are supported by the governing bodies of both schools will provide for the following:

(i) Marshlands Primary School – a change of age range, from the current Early Years to Year 6 to focus on children in Year 1 to Year 6 by removing Early Years and reception provision and specialising in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 provision.

(ii) Greenhall Nursery – a change of designation of types of special education needs and disabilities catered for – to include children with needs in the Early Years Foundation Stage prime areas of learning, physical, communication and language and personal, social and emotional development.

(Cabinet – 16 September 2020)

14. Thank you to schools

I wanted to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to our teachers, our wider school staff and our parents for their efforts and support in getting Staffordshire schools ready to welcome pupils back this term.

It is hugely important that pupils are back behind their desks and our schools have pulled out all the stops to make this happen.

Managing class or year bubbles was always going to be challenging and will remain so for the foreseeable future, so schools and indeed the service need our support more than ever.

15. Flu

Summer seems to have been and gone this year without many of us really having the opportunity to enjoy it as we normally would.

In a matter of just days, our army of gritters will be dusted off in preparation for the winter ahead.

Another seasonal event is the launch of the flu jab, which this year is more important than ever.

I would encourage everyone who is eligible to take up the offer and everyone else to think about having the jab if they can and, I hope many members will lead by example on this.

16. Covid-19 Testing

I know there is also huge frustration at how difficult it is to get a test through the national booking portal due to the issues with lab capacity. It is really important that everyone who has symptoms gets tested as this helps us identify who needs to self-isolate and in turn helps to prevent the spread of infection further.

This is something which I have raised both with our MPs and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

However, as a council we also pride ourselves on looking for solutions and together with Stoke-on-Trent City Council we have rapidly turned around three pilot testing schemes in Fenton, Stafford and Burton.

These are not the complete answer to the national issues, but are allowing more of our residents who need a test to get one.

17. Covid-19 – The Next Six Months

While many of us will have hoped that Covid-19 would have been consigned to history by now, sadly this is not the case, with the Prime Minister warning current restrictions could be in place for six months.

On the eve of what is the 200th day since the Covid-19 “lockdown”, we have seen how the virus once again is tightening its grip on the county and indeed on some of our neighbours.

Two hundred days ago we were there for the vulnerable, supplying emergency food parcels to thousands of people and providing millions of items of PPE to help people care for the frail and elderly, many of who sadly lost their lives.

We have achieved much since then, our schools are open, our businesses have welcomed back workers and our towns are no longer the ghost towns that they were, but we know that this can easily be snatched away.

That’s why as a county council we need to regroup, refocus and rise to the challenge of what lies ahead.

We are a great team at the county council and I know as members and officers we will do what ever to protect our residents and keep Staffordshire open for business.