Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Best Start

In September 2014, Cabinet agreed to consult with residents, individuals, partners, interested organisations and other key stakeholders in order to help shape a new approach to ensuring that all young children in Staffordshire will have the opportunity to get the best start in life. Cabinet have considered the findings arising from the consultation and have approved proposals for a new approach to giving children the best start in life. These proposals involve providing the right information and advice, refocusing resources on those in need and reconfiguring how Children’s Centres are used in future. They also build upon the key components to the best start in life and are based on an integrated model of commissioning and delivery with partners.

(Cabinet – 21 January 2015)

2. Care Act

The Care Act consolidates previously fragmented social care and health law into one single framework, which reforms the way Care and Support is accessed, assessed and funded. This is the biggest reform to the Social Care System in over 60 years, and seeks to make it clear what kind of care and support people should expect. Because the Care Act makes considerable changes to the law and practice around Social Care, most notably introducing a single national eligibility criteria, there is a need for the County Council to review and update its policies and guidance. The Cabinet have therefore given delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing to sign off on those revised policies and guidance, in order that they can be implemented with effect from 1 April 2015.

(Cabinet – 21 January 2015)

3. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub is a new programme working to improve access to business support and finance for small and medium sized (SME) businesses across the Local Enterprise Partnership’s area. Funding for Growth Hub activities is provided from the Government’s Regional Growth Fund. The Hub has piloted two new finance initiatives delivered by external fund managers, one to address gaps in small grant aid, and one to unlock private investment in local firms with high growth potential, both of which have exceeded expectations in terms of demand and job creation among local businesses.

(Cabinet – 21 January 2015)

4. A50 Growth Corridor

Cabinet have considered the progress in respect of the delivery of two projects to upgrade the A50(T) corridor in Staffordshire, to support economic and residential growth in the area, and to deal with congestion and safety problems. These projects are funded by Government, with a contribution from local developers and are being delivered by the County Council on behalf of the Department for Transport (DfT).
Project A, will deliver a grade-separated junction on the A50(T) to the West of Uttoxeter, providing improved access to a new housing and employment site to the south of the A50(T), and the existing and new JCB factories to the north of the A50(T). Project B will likely involve the reconfiguration of the existing Dove Way bridge over the A50(T) to the East of Uttoxeter, by converting it to a grade-separated junction. This second project may also involve closing the two ‘at grade’ roundabouts on the A50(T) in the Uttoxeter area. A further progress report will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting in May 2015.

(Cabinet – 17 December 2014)

5. Strategic Property Partner

In October 2013, Cabinet gave approval to commence the procurement of a strategic property partner, in association with Staffordshire’s Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), and for the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy, Finance and Corporate Issues to shortlist a preferred bidder.

Cabinet have selected Kier as the preferred bidder and Galliford Try with Panacea as the reserve bidder. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy, Finance and Corporate Issues has been given delegated powers, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Resources, to award the contact.

(Cabinet – 17 December 2014)

6. Quarterly Performance Report

Cabinet have received an overview of the county council’s performance (including the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Strategy) and the progress being made in delivering the three priority outcomes. They noted that:

- The Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimant rate in Staffordshire continues to decrease and remains below the national average and our neighbouring authorities. In September 2014, 1.2% of Staffordshire’s working age population claimed JSA, compared to 2.2% nationally.

- The number of new business start-ups fell by 5% between April and July 2014 compared with the same period in 2013. However, this needs to be considered alongside the reduction in job seekers allowance claimants and the high rate of business survival. In Staffordshire, 62% of businesses created in 2009 were still in operation after three years, compared to 59.7% nationally.

- As at August 2014, 79% of schools in Staffordshire were rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted which is an increase of 20 percentage points since 2010. This is lower than the national average (81%), but slightly above our statistical neighbours (78%). The county council has set a target of 80% of all schools in Staffordshire being ‘good or better’ by August 2015 and 90% of all schools being ‘good or better’ by August 2016.
These provisional, unvalidated results show that the number of pupils achieving 5 or more grade A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths has reduced in 2014 compared with 2013. However, Staffordshire is still performing above the national average with 54.4% of pupils achieving this level compared to 52.6% nationally.

(Cabinet – 17 December 2014)

7. Treasury Management, Annual Investment and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategies 2015/16

The Local Government Act 2003 requires a local authority to have regard to the Prudential Code and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years to ensure that its capital investment plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Prudential Indicators are approved as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Treasury Management Strategy is a key element of the MTFS as the planned capital expenditure programme drives the borrowing required.

Where possible, the County Council will continue to use its own cash instead of borrowing money whilst retaining the flexibility to take out loans if needed.

The Cabinet have resolved to recommend to the County Council, at its meeting on the 19 March 2015, the adoption of the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) 2015/16 and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy 2015/16.

(Cabinet – 21 January 2015)

8. Clough Hall Technology School: determination of statutory proposals to become a Church of England voluntary aided (VA) School

The Cabinet have approved a statutory proposal to close Clough Hall Technology School on 31 December 2014, together with a related proposal from the Lichfield Diocesan Board of Education to open a new Church of England voluntary aided (VA) school on 1 January 2015, to be called The King’s CE (VA) School. No comments or objections were received in relation to the proposals.

(Cabinet – 17 December 2014)

9. Partnerships

Since our last Full Council I have been engaged in a variety of work with partners looking at the future of Staffordshire and how together with the Districts, Boroughs, our colleagues in health and Stoke-on-Trent City Council we are able to deliver for local people the jobs, growth and services that people want and need.

Some members may be aware of our discussions between the county and districts being facilitated by Phil Swann, this process in addition to our regular discussions at the Strategic Partnership Board reflects the developing discussions and approaches around how we work together and how that will benefit the county and our partners.

The proof of this is our success as a County bringing more Growth Money into the area. The additional resources from the Government mean that, in total, nearly
£100m has been given to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to support us and our partners across the LEP to deliver Jobs and Growth.

It is clear that the LEP is building its own profile among local partners and is an ever stronger voice for local businesses at a time when growing our economy is moving from creating new jobs, to supporting our businesses to grow and create the better higher paying jobs that make sure our local economy continues to grow from strength to strength.