

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 21 March 2019

Present:

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

Apologies for absence: John Francis, Jill Hood, Keith James and Mike Sutherland

PART ONE

55. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

56. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 February 2019

RESOLVED – That subject to the following amendments, the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 14 February 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman:

- (i) The “Note by Clerk” on page 10 being amended by the insertion of the word “predominantly” after the word “vote”; and
- (ii) The insertion of the words “asked Mr Lawson to apologise and” after the words “In response, Mr Sutton, Mrs Woodward and Mr Deaville” in the fourth paragraph on page 14.

57. Chairman's Correspondence

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

58. 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 referred to paragraph 11 entitled "Financial Year" and added the following:

"While being in near employment together with creating more jobs will help provide more choice and flexibility for people, I am sure we were all deeply disappointed to hear the news about proposed job losses at both Wedgwood in Barlaston and Fox Biscuits in Uttoxeter.

In both cases, if the proposals do go ahead we will of course work with local partners and the Local Enterprise Partnership to see how we can best help those affected in terms of practical support and new employment or retraining opportunities."

Better Care Fund 2019/20

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins enquired as to how much the Better Care Fund was now worth to the County Council; whether it had aided integration between social care and the NHS; what were the criteria the Council had to meet in order to secure the whole of the Better Care Fund and whether that criteria was achievable. In response Mr Alan White indicated that the Better Care Fund was extremely complicated to administer but does deliver results. He added that the relationship between the Council and the NHS has improved significantly and that the value of the Fund to the County Council was around £20m but this funding did come with strings.

Staffordshire Warm Homes Fund

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Mr Robinson welcomed the news that the County Council had secured £3.795m for a Staffordshire Warm Homes Fund and enquired as to what monitoring would take place to ensure that all areas of the County would see some benefit; that local businesses would be able to secure some of the contracts for the work; whether any apprenticeships would be created; and how would Members be kept informed of progress of the initiative on the ground. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that he would forward details of Staffordshire businesses to the partnership. He added that the current funding was for urban homes but there was to be a future bid in respect of rural homes. Mr Alan White added that the scheme would be delivered through a limited liability partnership and he echoed Mr Robinson's comments in respect of the potential for local businesses to secure some of the contracts and the opportunity to create apprenticeships. He also confirmed that the implementation of the scheme would be monitored carefully and that Mr Robinson may wish to speak to the chairman of the relevant select committee to request that the Committee also monitors the scheme.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Review – Move to Incorporated Body

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mr Smith in relation to the activity of an adjoining LEP and the need to protect Staffordshire's interests, Mr Atkins indicated that the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent LEP worked closely with neighbouring LEPs through joint committees and concordats.

Secondary School Places

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Several Members indicated that they welcomed the news that, in Staffordshire, of the almost 8,000 applications made for transfer at age 11, nearly 92 per cent of parents were allocated their first preference school, with 95 per cent allocated one of their top three preferred schools. In response, Mr Philip White paid tribute to the work of the Schools Admissions Team and indicated that an additional 400 secondary school places had been found this year and that a further 360 places would be needed next year. Mr Snape also made reference to the number of schools in Staffordshire which were rated by Ofsted as "good" or "outstanding". Mrs Woodward referred to the 8% of parents were not allocated one of their top three preferred schools and the stress this caused to the young people concerned. She stressed the need for the County Council to keep striving to find additional places, particularly at the over-subscribed schools. Mr Atkins referred to the success of the County Council on planning the provision of school places and also stated that work still needed to be done to address the issue of fairer funding for Staffordshire's schools.

Ofsted Report on Children's Services

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward congratulated Mr Sutton, the Director of Families and Communities and her staff with regard to the announcement that the recent Ofsted inspection of the Council's children's services had resulted in Staffordshire retaining its overall rating of 'Good' - one of only three authorities in the West Midlands to achieve this rating. She added that there was however still work to do in respect of Special Educational Needs (SEND) services. Mr Sutton, along with other Members, also paid tribute to staff, to fellow Members and to the Corporate Parenting Panel for the contributions they had made. He added that the Council were working hard to tackle the issues around SEND. Mr Atkins indicated the Council was working hard with partners to improve the lives of children in Staffordshire and that there was currently 1137 looked after children in the County. He added that he had written to the Staffordshire MP's regarding the need for appropriate funding levels to tackle the issues around SEND.

Community Pothole Funding

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Several Members welcomed the proposals for Members to be allocated an additional £20,000 each to focus on highways work which were important to their local communities. Mr Smith added that this money could be utilised to lever additional

funding and grants from partner organisations such as parish councils. He also paid tribute to the work of the highways team. Mrs Woodward referred to how Members would be able to pool their funding with that of the Members for adjacent divisions to secure best value for money for the local community. She also paid tribute to the Infrastructure Outcomes Group which was having some success in tackling highway maintenance issues. Mr Derek Davis indicated that £20,000 did not stretch very far and that more funding ought to be allocated to deprived areas. In response Mr Snape indicated that the £20,000 was additional funding for minor schemes and that the planned maintenance works would continue unaffected. Mr Atkins added that in order that Members secured the best value from their allocation, it was important that they speak to highways officers to ensure that any improvement works they proposed to fund were not already in the highways maintenance programme Mrs Fisher thanked Members for their comments and, in responding to a question from Mrs Jessel relating to the additional funding being made available both by the Council and also Central Government to tackle potholes, she indicated that the funding would be used to tackle the backlog of category 3 defects, for resurfacing, surface dressing and extra gulley crews and that the money will be spent wisely.

Staffordshire Day and Ironman

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Mr Winnington and Mr Atkins referred to the proposals to promote Staffordshire Day on 1 May and the fourth Ironman 70.3 Staffordshire on 9 June and how these events brought additional income into the County through tourism.

Financial Year

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Mr Brookes thanked Mr Atkins for his statement in respect of the anticipated job losses at Fox Biscuits in Uttoxeter and he urged the Council to work with East Staffordshire Borough Council to retain the heritage of Elks' in the town. Mr Colin Greatorex referred to the success of the County Council in working with partners to bring to fruition major infrastructure schemes such as the Lichfield Southern Bypass. He also welcomed the announcement that Staffordshire was to participate in the Business Rates retention pilot.

Several Members spoke about the proposals in the Council's Medium Term Financial Statement which would see the removal of the funding for the four Community Partnership Officer Posts. The Members also paid tribute to the contribution the four post-holders had made to the work of the Council. Mr Atkins stated that he echoed the views expressed by Members and reported that there was a new post to be created focused on a scheme to support the Council's People Helping People enabler. He also referred to the role of the Cabinet Community Support Members in supporting local members in their communities.

Mr Wileman referred to traffic congestion in Burton upon Trent and the need for improvements to the A38.

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

59. Recommendations to the Council

(a) First Review of the Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Joint Waste Local Plan (2010 - 2026)

The Council were informed that the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Waste Local Plan 2010 - 2026 (the Waste Local Plan) was prepared jointly with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and was adopted in March 2013. New regulations which came into effect on 6 April 2018 required a review of the waste and minerals local plans every 5 years, starting from the date of adoption of the local plan.

A joint review of the Waste Local Plan had therefore been carried out with Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Overall, the review concluded that the Waste Local Plan was performing well and was providing an effective planning policy framework for the determination of planning applications for waste development in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The Waste Local Plan was also in conformity with national waste planning policy and guidance and there had been no changes to local circumstances or strategic priorities which would suggest that revisions to the waste planning policies were necessary. Therefore, the Waste Local Plan could continue to carry weight in the determination of planning applications for waste development.

A report on the review was considered by the Planning Committee on 7 February 2019 and by the Cabinet on 20 February 2019. The Planning Committee and Cabinet endorsed the conclusions of the First Review of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Waste Local Plan, that there was no need to revise the Waste Local Plan. Officers at the City Council were also seeking formal sign off of the conclusions of the review document.

RESOLVED – That the conclusions of the First Review of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Waste Local Plan (2010 – 2026) that there is no need to revise the Waste Local Plan at this time be accepted so that it can continue to carry weight in the determination of planning applications for waste development.

(b) Pay Policy Statement 2019/20 - 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.

RESOLVED – That the Pay Policy Statement for 2019/20 (as set out in Annex A to the report) be approved.

60. Independent Remuneration Panel

(a) Members' Allowances Scheme - Independent Remuneration Panel

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, and in response to feedback from Members of the Council, the Panel proposed a change to the County Council's Constitution to include three new roles of Opposition Select Committee Vice-Chairmen created from the single Shadow Cabinet Member Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA). The Independent Remuneration Panel also proposed that the Opposition Deputy Leader should hold a vice-chairmanship on the Corporate Review Select Committee and the three Opposition Select Committee posts should hold a vice-chairmanship on the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee, Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee and the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee.

In the report, the Panel also proposed that the Chairman of the County Council, in consultation with the relevant group leader, be given delegated authority to increase the allowance paid to the Vice-Chairmen of a Committee to the level of the corresponding Chairman's allowance if they were required to take on the responsibilities of the Chairman for a sustained period. The Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Chairman of the Committee would be suspended during this period.

Mr Brookes moved, and Mr David Williams seconded, the following motion:

- (i) The Council's thanks be extended to the Independent Remuneration Panel for their report.
- (ii) The Council does not accept at this moment in time their recommendation for an increase in overall allowances of 2% in line with the NJC pay award to staff.
- (iii) The Council also feels in a time of change, that the recommendations of the Panel to make changes to the levels of remuneration be deferred for further consideration later this year, as the recommendations do not reflect the future ongoing developing roles of Members.

Mrs Woodward indicated that she was content to accept the motion and added that there needed to be a lot more discussion about the developing roles of Members. She also stated that she had particular concerns about the remuneration for the Joint Chairs of the All Party Working Groups and at the lack of engagement with the Labour Opposition Group. Mrs Woodward sought reassurance that the Opposition Group would be involved in any future discussions on this issue.

Following a vote, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

RESOLVED – (a) The Council's thanks be extended to the Independent Remuneration Panel for their report.

(b) The Council does not accept at this moment in time their recommendation for an increase in overall allowances of 2% in line with the NJC pay award to staff.

(c) The Council also feels in a time of change, that the recommendations of the Panel to make changes to the levels of remuneration be deferred for further consideration later this year, as the recommendations do not reflect the future ongoing developing roles of Members.

(b) Independent Remuneration Panel - Appointment

Members were informed that the Independent Remuneration Panel currently had five members who were appointed by the County Council. The minimum number of people permitted to sit on the Independent Remuneration Panel was three and the maximum was five. Members of the Panel usually served a term of four years, but this may be extended where it is expedient to do so.

Leslie Trigg was first appointed as an Independent Remuneration Panel member in 2014. The County Council at its meeting 24 May 2018 extended the period of office for Leslie Trigg as a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel for a further period of 12 months to 31 March 2019. As the other members of the Panel were relatively new, it was suggested that Leslie Trigg's term of office should be extended for a further period of 2 years in order to retain his expertise.

Mr Winnington moved, and Mrs Trowbridge seconded, the following motion:

- (i) The Council's thanks be extended to Leslie Trigg for the work he has done on the Independent Remuneration Panel.
- (ii) That the Audit and Standards Committee be requested to carry out a recruitment process for the Independent Remuneration Panel as soon as possible.

Mrs Woodward expressed her disappointment that the proposal not to extend Mr Trigg's term of office had not been shared with the Opposition Group prior to the meeting. She added that she intended to abstain from voting on the motion.

Following a vote, the Chairman declared the motion carried.

RESOLVED – (a) The Council's thanks be extended to Leslie Trigg for the work he has done on the Independent Remuneration Panel.

(b) That the Audit and Standards Committee be requested to carry out a recruitment process for the Independent Remuneration Panel as soon as possible.

Note by Clerk: The following Members requested that their names be recorded as having abstained from voting on the motion: Charlotte Atkins, Ann Beech, Ron Clarke, Maureen Compton, Derek Davis, Syed Hussain, Dave Jones, Kyle Robinson and Susan Woodward.

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

Mr Robinson expressed concern at the proposals of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to increase the precept by £24 per household especially when the

Staffordshire Police had seen a reduction of 600 police officers since 2010. He enquired as to what the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) had been doing in respect of Lobbying Central Government for additional funding to protect front line services rather than passing on the cost to Staffordshire ratepayers. He also enquired as to why the PFCC was implementing a policy of closing public desks including the ones in Kidsgrove, Leek, Cheadle, Newcastle, Biddulph and Stone. Mrs Eagland also raised concerns at the proposed increases in Police precept. In response, Mr Sweeney indicated that it was not for him to answer on behalf of the PFCC and that Mr Robinson and Mrs Eagland could raise these issues directly with the PFCC and/or the Chief Constable. He added that the Panel, at its next meeting, was to receive the PFCC's detailed proposals on how this additional funding would be utilised. Mrs Woodward requested that, once available, this information be shared with all Members of the Council.

Mrs Woodward also enquired as to why the Panel chose to support the increase in precept rather than exercising their power to veto the PFCC's proposals. In response, Mr Sweeney stated that the Panel had the power to veto the Precept if they considered it to be too high or too low. The veto had to be approved by two-thirds of the Panel membership (ie 8 of the 12 members). If vetoed, the Commissioner had to submit a revised higher or lower Precept depending on the Panels reasons for veto. After considering that revised Precept the Panel had no further power of veto and the Commissioner could action his revised version.

In response to a further question from Mrs Woodward relating to changes to the Police Pensions Scheme, Mr Sweeney and Mr Snape indicated that they would be happy to meet with her to discuss this matter further.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

62. Questions

Syed Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

What percentage of working age people in Anglesey and Stapenhill earn less than the average weekly wage (£551)?

Reply

Average earnings data is not available below district/borough level from data sources including the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). Latest figures for East Staffordshire show that the average weekly wage in 2018 was £501 compared to the Staffordshire average of £551 and UK average (including London) of £569.

Since 2010, the wages of Staffordshire's residents have increased by around £57 per week, with the average £551 earned by a resident of Staffordshire working full-time exceeding the West Midlands Region average of £537.

Although average wages for residents of East Staffordshire are currently less than the national average, the cost of living within the district and county overall is far more favourable than many other parts of the country. A useful indication of this is housing affordability; in East Staffordshire the average price of a house is currently 6.4 times the average annual wage compared to 7.9 times in England as a whole.

Supplementary Question

This is evidence which shows that average wages for so many people in Anglesey and Stapenhill are currently less than the national average. May I ask the Cabinet Member what will the County Council do to enable these people to achieve their aspirations?

Reply

The County Council is already doing a great deal, not just in Anglesey and Stapenhill, but across the whole of the County. As is mentioned in my response to your original question, we have made tremendous progress in terms of wage growth in Staffordshire, performing better than the region and getting dangerously close to the national average. Mentioning a few things we have done, we have, through the European Social Fund, created 18,000 new learners within the County; we have the sixth best performance in the Country for reducing the number of people not in employment, education or training (NEETs); since 2014, we have also seen a 50% reduction in the number of people with no qualifications; we have over 4,000 people on community learning projects; we have the open door programme which has supported internships to over 1,000 people since 2009; and we have a very low unemployment rate of 1.4%. As you can see, there is already an enormous amount of work ongoing and I'd be very happy to talk to you further about these initiatives and others, and how we can use them within Anglesey and Stapenhill.

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

Question

Barnett's Field, also known as Clough Hall Playing Field, in the Talke and Red Street Division was put forward by Staffordshire County Council to be included in the Joint Local Plan process for the future development of 424 homes. The Joint Local Plan is currently delayed by Newcastle Borough Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council for various reasons. Residents are anxious that the development of this field will be a detriment to the local community as it is currently used for sport and recreational activities. There have also been flooding issues with this site over many years. Taking the above into account, will Staffordshire County Council withdraw its support to dispose of this site?

Reply

This former playing field is one of many examples of the changes in facilities required to provide education in the county. There are many other examples though where new facilities are required and these need funding. Not all of that funding is met

through government allocations or S106 contributions from developments. Currently we estimate a further £22m will be needed for the projected school places additional demand over the next 5 years. Where possible therefore we need to consider the whole of the school estate and where surplus land is available we need to consider how that can best be used.

For all council assets that are no longer required for their original purposes and are potentially suitable for development we will include those sites in the local plan process and trust that process to allocate the right sites in the local community for the housing need for that area. Local planning policies and procedures will then ensure that any subsequent development is right for the site and immediate local area.

Supplementary Question

This site acts as a natural soakaway for a lot of the surrounding properties. I know that there has been a lot of problems with the drainage on the site due to lack of maintenance. The County Council owns the land and I believe that the authority should have asked residents for their views before submitting such a large area to the Joint Local Plan. I understand that the County Council wishes to build more homes across the County but I'm not hearing enough about infrastructure. Will the Leader, or the relevant Cabinet Member, agree to visit me in my Division and listen to the views of the residents I represent who are raising concerns about the development of Barnett's Field.

Reply

This is all part of the spatial planning process. We have to do the best things for the Council's assets and I would advise that the best person to represent your Division is you. Our officers will help you take the concerns through the Neighbourhood Planning process. You will also be aware that I am quite keen in ensuring that the appropriate infrastructure is put in place at the same time that any new housing is.

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

Question

What is Staffordshire County Council doing to tackle rising knife crime in Staffordshire?

Reply

Staffordshire County Council are working with a range of statutory and voluntary sector partners, including Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire Police, district and borough councils and the Staffordshire Commissioner to develop a robust approach to tackle youth violence (including carrying / using knives) across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This work is co-ordinated through the Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Youth Violence & Vulnerability Partnership Group.

Supplementary Question

Does the Leader agree with me that Staffordshire Police and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner should be taking more action to tackle this issue, especially when knife crime in Staffordshire has risen by 88% from 367 offences in 2010 to 689 last year? And what opportunities are there for the County Council to apply for some Government funding for the prevention of knife crime and also for extra youth programmes across the County?

Reply

It's not a question of asking for more money, it's about making better use of the funding we actually have. So, targeting those at most risk of knife crime is the best way forward. I know that everyone is concerned about what is being reported in the national news but there are certain areas that are probably more at risk and it is sad that people want to resort to carrying a knife to defend themselves from possible violence from others. All of this is not just a problem for the Police, it requires a holistic approach; targeting through the Youth Offending Service, test purchasing of knives in shops by trading standards, and also listening to the views expressed by the Youth Parliament and through Youth Councils. Knife amnesties also have an important role. Please be assured that we are working with partners through the Violence and Vulnerability Partnership Group.

63. Petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

Chairman