

To: All Members and Officers of the County Council.

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Dear Sir/Madam,

County Council - Thursday, 25th July, 2019

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the County Council.

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Thursday, 25th July, 2019 meeting of the County Council, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

10. **Questions (Pages 1 - 16)**

Questions to be asked by Members of the County Council of the Leader of the Council, a Cabinet Member, or a Chairman of a Committee. The question will be answered by the relevant Member and the Member asking the question may then ask a follow up question which will also be answered

John Henderson
Chief Executive

Enc

QUESTION 1

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Helen Fisher
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By David Brookes

Question

Could Members be assured that the extra investment allowed for each division within the budgets for highway improvements can be used in full and that there will be minimal and little administrative costs to allow maximum highway investment for the much-needed improvements and repairs ensuring maximum value to the ratepayer and residents of Staffordshire?

Reply

This one-off additional funding has been devolved to Members for locally identified maintenance priorities to directly replace or enhance the life of existing highway assets.

Members have been given the opportunity to discuss how to maximise the impact of the investment; including consideration of pooling divisional allocations, combining wider Divisional Highway Programme funding and the utilisation of the funding to secure additional external contributions.

A significant number of Member priorities have now been identified and work programmes are being drawn up and delivered. To ensure the available funding makes the greatest impact, effective planning and co-ordination is essential and delivery will take place throughout the financial year, with the majority of works completed by 31 March 2020.

Estimates for each element of identified work have been provided but all costs are indicative and are heavily dependent on factors such as site constraints, adverse weather and existing asset condition. In addition, works that involve excavations or tying in to existing structures can sometimes lead to unforeseen costs once on site.

The estimated costs for the Member's £20k maintenance schemes will include all associated activities to get the work on the ground, such as any necessary design; community engagement; legal noticing; statutory liaison with utility companies; and traffic management requirements (e.g. road closures, temporary traffic signals etc.). There are no additional funding streams to cover these activities and they would also have to be factored in to any works you were to commission yourself through a local contractor.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Helen Fisher
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By David Brookes

Question

Where wild flowers have been sown on or adjacent to the road verges, does the contractor moderate their cutting regime to allow the wild flowers to finish flowering and go to seed, encouraging further biodiversity within our landscape in both urban and rural highways?

Reply

Several years ago, the highways team worked with the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to review rural grass cutting specification and help protect local biodiversity. Across the Staffordshire Moorlands there are significant lengths of rural verges that are cut just once each year in late September / early October in order to preserve the self-seeded wild flowers. Elsewhere, rural highway verge cutting is kept to just one swathe width (approximately 1m), or full visibility splays at junctions, and carried out 2 or 3 times per year to maintain highway safety.

In the urban areas most grass verges are maintained by Borough, District and Parish Councils through effective two-tier working arrangements. The County Council makes a financial contribution to meet minimum highway safety requirements in terms of visibility splays and to prevent excessive overgrowth adjacent to footways. However, the frequency, extent and timing of the grass cutting is determined by the respective local Councils to meet different local needs, including balancing local biodiversity and amenity value.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Alan White
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing**

By Cllr Ian Lawson

Question

Were you aware of the list that has been produced, rating the performance of CCGs in the Northern sector, where the Staffordshire Moorlands had two of their CCG's rated in the lowest sector, and the others not a lot better. With the ongoing problems here in the Moorlands, i.e. Hearing Aids and 2 Hospitals awaiting decisions, I would like your comments on the situation? This comes at the request of the Staffordshire Moorlands Health Committee which met last week.

Reply

All CCGs have been given a rating by NHS England for 2018/19 based on their performance against a national Improvement and Assessment Framework. This includes consideration of the extent to which they have good outcomes and good services for their registered populations, as well as their financial position. North Staffordshire is one of eleven CCGs nationally rated 'inadequate'. This is largely due to their financial position, with a substantial overspend in 2018/19, and forecasted again in 2019/20.

The CCGs intend to review provision of hearing aids for non-complex audiology in the wake of NICE Guideline NG98 - Hearing Loss in Adults: Assessment and Management and expect to consult with the public commencing September 2019.

The CCGs have recently completed a public consultation on the future of community hospitals in North Staffordshire. The findings were considered by their Governing Body at their meeting of 25 June 2019 and will be reflected in the Decision Making Business Case, which is under development and which will form the basis of a final decision, anticipated in December 2019.

CCG ratings are here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ccg-annual-assessment-report-2018-19.pdf>

The CCG Improvement and Assessment Framework is here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CCG-IAF-2018.19.pdf>

Minutes from the CCG Governing Body meeting 25 June are here:

file:///C:/Users/rharl1sc/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wek_yb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/NS%20SOT%20CCGs%20Extraordinary%20GB%20in%20Common%2025%20June%202019%20v2.pdf

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Mark Winnington
Cabinet Member for Economic Growth**

By Cllr Susan Woodward

Question

After the recent tragedy at Chasewater when a young man lost his life, statements by the Council have indicated that there is to be no full safety review of the site. The Cabinet Member reiterated the message in the media that Chasewater is “not a swimming lake” yet, three weeks previously, the well-publicised Ironman event took place in the same waters. Does the Cabinet Member agree that the County Council is sending out mixed messages about swimming at Chasewater and, if so, what does he intend to do about the ongoing safety concerns of those who know Chasewater best?

Reply

- At all times of the year, public swimming/ use of Chasewater for recreational swimming is prohibited and there are signs around the lake which make this very clear to all who make use of the Park.
- When we know that there is a period of warm weather, communication is increased to reiterate this message and as this is recognised as good practice it will continue.
- Staffordshire County Council Rangers patrol the area as much as possible, they use a megaphone to inform people in the water why swimming is not allowed. All incidents are logged. If people refuse to come out and there is any indication that they may be under the influence of alcohol etc, or if children are at risk, the police are called.
- Following the incident, staff from Rural County and SCC Health & Safety reviewed the provision of signs and life rings at Chasewater. There are numerous life rings in place and these are regularly checked, as well as a significant number of signs, as noted above.
- We will await the outcomes of the inquest into the recent tragic incident and will review our approach with input from emergency services to see if there is anything further which we can do.
- **Ironman** is a professionally planned and managed event; the welfare of the competitors is at the forefront of the planning process and therefore there are extensive safety measures in place. The competitors have experience of

open water swimming and they're wearing wetsuits which trap a layer of warmth and guard against cold water shock.

- We do recognise that there are other users of the water who do swim in the reservoir (i.e. Chasewater Open Water Swimming and Tri Club), however, as with Ironman these are time limited, regulated and fully supervised.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Philip White
Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability**

By Cllr Susan Woodward

Question

Cllr White will be aware that Lichfield District Council says that the condition of Friary Grange Leisure Centre is “poor” and that “the age, condition and investment required would not represent good value for council tax payers”. Can Cllr White tell me who has been responsible for the condition of the Leisure Centre and any investment that was required for its maintenance – the County Council, the District Council or Friary School – and when was this arrangement put in place?”

Reply

The Joint Use Agreement for community use was signed in 1971. The original building consisted of sports hall and changing facilities only. Various extensions to the original building have been made over the years since the original building was conceived. The County Council & The Friary school have maintained the sports hall, original changing rooms, the dance studio and associated changing facilities, and the external all-weather pitch. All other parts of the building are the responsibility of Lichfield District Council. The Friary School and Lichfield District Council share the utility costs for heating and lighting the building on the basis of their hourly usage.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Gill Heath
Cabinet Member for Communities**

By Kyle Robinson

Question

The communities of Kidsgrove, Butt Lane and Talke have recently been severely affected by a spike in crime and anti-social behaviour. As the local County Councillor, I have raised these matters with the Local Policing Team, the Staffordshire Commissioner and Newcastle Borough Councils Anti-Social Behaviour Team.

Out of many discussions I have had with the above organisations, it has been highlighted that there is a distinct lack of youth services in our community despite local volunteers and Staffordshire Clubs for Young People doing what they can to offer some youth activities. What extra support and resources can the County Council provide for the communities I represent, which are in desperate need of more youth services and facilities?

Reply

Staffordshire County Council is committed to Placed Based working and Kidsgrove, Butt Lane and Talke has been the area that was initially targeted in Newcastle-under-Lyme to ensure that the partners worked collaboratively in the best interests of families and communities in this area.

To do this they used an Early Help Performance Framework, which took data from a range of places including the borough council, police, health and many more. Anti-social behaviour was one of the indicators that was considered. At this time the data and local intelligence identified that there was a range of youth activities available for young people and this was not an area that should be an immediate priority.

SCVYS have an interactive map which shows some of the provision available for young people <http://staffscvys.org.uk/find-activities/> and partners in the district undertook a mapping exercise and worked with the community and based on feedback from young people the view of the group was that there was adequate provision locally.

A further area the council is seeking to embed is people helping people. As such we are encouraging #DoingOurBit which is about the local community doing more to help families and communities in need. One of the areas that could be explored is how people locally can deliver activities for young people. Within your area could the Kidsgrove Local Area Partnership work to secure additional funding or people to deliver this extra support?

In addition, each county councillor has £2,500 to allocate through the People Helping People Fund, to projects in their area which will help children, young people and families who need support, or help adults to stay healthy and independent. It is aimed at expanding existing provision or helping new groups to get off the ground – if local volunteers are available, this could be a fantastic opportunity to help them get going.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Philip Atkins OBE
Leader of the Council**

By Kyle Robinson

Question

Could the Leader please outline what steps this Council has taken to protect pollinators across Staffordshire? Will he commit the Council to planting pollinator friendly wildflower corridors on County Council owned land and in our County Council owned parks?

Reply

The reason for the decline in pollinators is thought to be mainly due to decline in habitats such as wildflower meadows. The Council considers the needs of pollinating insects in the following ways:

Management of Country Parks

Pollinating insects are considered in our management of countryside sites, in the context of the habitat types they contain. For example, Apedale, Deep Hayes and Greenway Bank Country Parks have important meadows and flowering grass verges including some with rare orchids. We have developed management approaches, e.g. a low intensity grazing plan for the meadows at Apedale to control the more vigorous grasses so that wildflowers can thrive. These will continue to be protected and managed.

Another important habitat for pollinators is heathland, found mainly in Cannock Chase and Chasewater but on many other sites in the county. Our management plan for both sites includes bare ground management for solitary bees and wasps, which are important pollinators.

Cannock Chase and Chasewater heaths have been managed as mixed habitat areas consisting of lowland heath (for which it has been given international status), gorse scrub, scattered trees and copses and areas of woodland and also include important areas of wood pasture and wetlands. By maintaining a diversity of habitats within a site, there are likely to be flowering species across the majority of the seasons when pollinators are active.

Regeneration Sites

The Council advises on the development of regeneration sites and manages habitats on some sites. An example is at Redhill where good meadows have been created and enhanced.

Road Verges

Road verge management is another important way that flower-rich grassland can be maintained. The most flower-rich verges have been managed to ensure that wildflowers can flower and set seed, providing a nectar source for a range of invertebrate species, whilst preventing scrub and bracken from displacing these wildflower species.

Planning advice

When providing ecological advice to third parties, we work hard to retain natural habitats wherever possible, pushing for mitigation or habitat compensation where this is not possible in line with planning policy and relevant legislation.

In artificial situations, e.g. where natural habitats are not present, our advice is to request pollinator enhancements including planting of appropriate flower species and creation of nesting habitat etc. as required.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25 JULY 2019

**Question to Mark Winnington
Cabinet Member for Economic Growth**

By David Smith

Question

Twelve months ago, on the 11th July 2018, together with a County Officer, I had a meeting with Mr Francis Thomas, Head of Corporate Affairs at West Midlands Railway.

At the meeting Mr Thomas gave an absolute assurance that they would not introduce charging at Shenstone Station until they had completed a full public consultation which would include highway proposals for on street parking and a study into the point of origin of vehicles before introducing parking charges.

My understanding is that there was an understanding that WMT were intent on introducing charging for parking at Shenstone (and Penkridge) and they would work with the County Council so any displacement of vehicles onto the surrounding highway was managed properly.

Can you advise what progress has been made with WMR to see, now they have introduced charging without consultation, what we can do to help ease the situation?

Reply

As Chair of West Midland's Rail Executive, I was naturally very disappointed to hear that WMT were proposing to introduce parking charges at Shenstone Railway Station without undertaking the proper promised consultation and in a manner that would have been uncoordinated with the necessary parking restrictions on adjacent roads – some of which the County Council has offered to finance.

Whilst the bottom line is that we can't stop WMT introducing parking charges at their controlled stations, they really need to explain to their customers why they think charging is a good idea especially as parking at stations within the TfWM area is free. However, my understanding is that whilst ticket machines have been installed parking charges have yet to be introduced.

WMT had initially indicated that charging was going to be introduced from 1st July 2019, but the active involvement of County Council officers has delayed this introduction. An officer met with WMT to raise our concerns with respect to the car parking charges and to discuss the wider positives surrounding station travel planning. The latest correspondence received yesterday states that WMT has

now carried out a study which includes station/train user engagement along the Lichfield line including Shenstone and has promised to provide the County Council with a copy of their report.

WMT has now also agreed to work with the County Council prior to the introduction of parking charges to look at both the level/pricing of charges and the management of vehicle displacement onto the local highway network. They are also looking at a cycle parking investment programme.

I will continue to press the matter.