

To: All Members and Officers of the County Council.

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Date: 10 October 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

County Council - Thursday, 10th October, 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, 10th October, 2019 meeting of the County Council, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

10. **Questions (Pages 1 - 20)**

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

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QUESTION 1

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By Susan Woodward

Question

“All County Councillors and Unison members across Staffordshire will be aware of the recent emails from the Regional Secretary of Unison alleging serious financial mismanagement within the County Council. The Leader will also be aware of discussions that I have had over many months with the Chief Executive and senior officers to address concerns raised by Unison, along with my Deputy Group Leader and others. Will he now undertake to respond in detail to the serious questions raised in the emails that Members have received?”

Reply

We firmly refute these allegations which are misleading or simply untrue.

The Unison claims refer to historical matters which have already been investigated and, where appropriate, action was taken. Some failings in procurement practice between 2012 and 2016 were identified, and procurement practices have been changed as a result. An independent investigation found there was absolutely no fraudulent activity or personal gain by employees because of this.

Staffordshire County Council remains willing to work with all of our trade unions in a constructive and respectful way. We would hope that trade unions would share that approach and seek to represent the best interests of their fee-paying members.

We will be responding to Unison in due course. If any member wants any further information they have only to ask, as has always been the case. After all, it is the elected members that run this Council, not Unison, which is why it was dealt with by a cross party committee.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

**Question to Mark Deaville
Cabinet Member for Commercial**

By Susan Woodward

Question

“Can the Cabinet Member please tell me what have been the costs of securing the Greenwood House site in Burntwood from 2009 to the present?”

Reply

Whilst the site has remained unused since 2009, the site itself was not secured in any way until 2014/15 when small scale vandalism began to happen. Since then through to the end of March 2019 a total of £42,881 has been spent securing the site. This excludes the costs of removing the recent travellers and cleaning up the site after they vacated.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By Charlotte Atkins

Question

What student discount travel schemes now operate within Staffordshire? Which companies operate them and which routes are covered? How do the discounts compare to the discontinued Your Staffordshire Card Scheme? Are there any districts / boroughs within Staffordshire where no concessionary travel schemes operate for young people?

Reply

There are 18 bus companies that operate in Staffordshire and they all operate their own commercial fare structures. In general, they all offer discounts for regular bus users of all age groups.

85% of Staffordshire bus journeys are taken on bus routes operated by Arriva, First, Midland Classic, or D&G buses. Each one of these companies have their own student discount schemes for regular users.

As members will recall the Your Staffordshire Card scheme was brought in to encourage bus companies to bring their own schemes forward and to encourage young people to use public transport. It was ended as pass holder numbers and YSC bus trips had been in a terminal decline for several years. The available evidence suggested that this was due to young people voting with their feet and switching to alternative, better value, commercial products offered by the bus companies that were right for them in their area.

I am not aware of any areas of Staffordshire where buses are operated which don't have some form of commercial discount fare structure for regular bus users.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By Kyle Robinson

Question

Residents of the Red Street community have raised concerns about Crackley Bank and surrounding roads being designated by the council as diversionary routes for heavy traffic whilst works take place on the busy A34. Staffordshire County Council is too quick to allow this route to be used as a diversion to the detriment of local people. In future, will the County Council do all it can to seek other routes to mitigate the strain put on the residents of Red Street?

Reply

Since July, the highway team has been delivering a major scheme on the A34 Talke Road, Newcastle involving the replacement of drainage, kerbing and resurfacing of the carriageway.

Lane closures have been in place on the A34 for the duration of the scheme with night time closures from September through to mid-October, week nights only, Monday to Friday.

Where diversion routes are required during road closures, the network management team seek to ensure wherever possible that the preferred and hence signed diversion routes are a road of the same classification. In this case the signed diversion route for closures on the A34 is via the A500.

Work in the vicinity of Parkhouse roundabout has also required the closure of the unclassified road known as Parkhouse Road West for which the diversion route identified and signed was a higher-class road, the C363 Crackley Bank.

The increasing use of sat nav can mean that motorists may follow routes other than the signed diversion route and similarly, highway users that are familiar with the area may choose to use other local routes despite the signing put in place.

The network management team will continue to seek to minimise the impact of road closures on local communities firstly by keeping the number of such occasions to a minimum and secondly by routing diverted traffic to roads of a similar nature.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By Kyle Robinson

Question

“Can the Leader of the Council please provide an update about what Staffordshire County Council is doing to improve and promote integrated transport in Staffordshire?”

Reply

As the Member may be aware improving and promoting integrated transport in Staffordshire starts with strategic planning and for many years the authority has developed and promoted eight integrated transport strategies to align with our eight local planning authority partners.

The strategies cover all modes of transport and are reviewed regularly to consider major planning consultations and any changes in transport issues and priorities.

The authority is actively involved in Midlands Connect which seeks to influence forward investment programmes of Highways England and Network Rail making sure that Staffordshire’s voice is heard and the right infrastructure is built for our economy.

We are also engaged in West Midlands Rail which aims to improve local rail services in the area building on the success of over 54% rail passenger growth in Staffordshire in the last 10 years.

Walking and Cycling is encouraged at an early age in Staffordshire via the promotion of walking buses and cycling training via our Bikeability programme. We are now in the final stages of developing our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which has been undertaken using monies gained from a successful DfT bid.

Good relations with our public bus operators are maintained and improvements to on-street real time public transport information and other bus priority infrastructure have been implemented to encourage modal shift and support the commercial bus network.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By David Smith

Question

At the July Council meeting I asked the following 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?

West Midlands Rail have now implemented the charges for parking and, as anticipated, the car park at Shenstone Station is now running at half capacity and the car parking in Shenstone has seriously worsened. What action can the Council take to address this problem? We already have a plan to better control parking but this will not be operational before the year end.

Reply

As Chair of West Midlands Rail Executive, I am extremely disappointed that parking charges have now been introduced in an uncoordinated manner without the necessary parking restrictions on the adjacent roads. This is despite assurances from West Midlands Trains that they would work with the County Council prior to the introduction of parking charges to look at how the displacement of vehicles onto the local highway network could be managed – some of which the County Council has offered to finance.

My officers are aware of the impact that these charges are having on local residents living in the vicinity of Shenstone Rail Station and they have raised these issues with West Midlands Trains. I can assure you that they will continue

to liaise and work with West Midlands Trains to try and agree solutions that are acceptable to both parties and that will minimise the impact of vehicle displacement on the local highway network.

West Midlands Trains has worked with the County Council to reduce the level of parking charges that have now been introduced at Shenstone Rail Station.

I will continue to press the matter and would like to thank Local Members for raising awareness of the issue.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By Ann Edgeller

Question

“As Mental Health Champion, I have spoken with various people involved in Mental Health and discover there is still no set ‘pathway’ for people’s progressive needs in order for them to progress to better health. What is the County Council doing, working with the CCGs and MPTF, to resolve this issue?”

Reply

The Council continues to work with the NHS, including the CCG and MPFT, to implement the Mental Health Strategy “Mental Health is Everybody’s Business”.

The Council continues to support people to look after mental well-being in the same way as physical health. This includes an awareness raising campaign, training to help people build resilience, and targeted suicide prevention activities for higher risk groups.

There is no single assessment and care pathway: every person is different and has different needs. Some people with mental health conditions require intensive interventions short term to enable them to recover; others may require ongoing therapy and support over a longer period.

The Council works with CCGs and MPFT to ensure that people have an integrated health and social care assessment and support plan. This is illustrated by:

- The recent Cabinet decision to extend the integrated working arrangements with MPFT, which includes Mental Health social care, for a further 3 years;
- The appointment of an Assistant Director for Adult Social Care and Safeguarding / Director of Adult Social care jointly with MPFT;
- The use of the Care Programme Approach to jointly assess people’s health and social care needs and develop appropriate integrated support plans focusing on recovery and well-being outcomes;
- Commissioning of joint mental health services on behalf of the CCGs, jointly with social care services;
- New commissioning arrangements for Supported Living for people with mental health conditions who require support longer term, which will offer the least restrictive care to help people maintain their independence.

We always appreciate feedback and I would be very happy to meet with Cllr Edgeller to explore what further specific changes we could make to improve people’s experience.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By Ann Edgeller

Question

Whenever there is disruption on the M6 Junctions 12-15, traffic is diverted through Stafford and it becomes gridlocked.

This is becoming more frequent and together with heavier volumes of traffic, in addition to scheduled road works, is making local journeys difficult if not impossible.

With so much housing development taking place or planned in Stafford, will the County Council use its powers and influence on others to look into this problem, and also with a view to help resolve the situation whenever there is a Planning Application in the south of the town?

Reply

The network management unit (NMU) work closely with Highways England to manage traffic in the event of a major incident that requires closure of the M6 through Staffordshire.

In the case of protracted closures or restrictions on the motorway, the authority requires the deployment of a national, rather than emergency, diversion route, and variable messaging on the strategic network advises of the closure from Dover to Carlisle, to allow motorists to make alternative route choices. We have seen the implementation of this strategic diversion significantly reduce the volume of traffic that makes it to the point of closure, and subsequently divert onto the Staffordshire network.

In addition to the above, any works or developments on the route through Staffordshire are advised they are working on an agreed emergency diversion route for the M6 before works commence, and in the case of an incident will be required to remove or reduce traffic management as appropriate, or ensure that signals are manually controlled to assist in maintaining traffic flows.

When disruption or congestion occurs on the M6, rather than an incident, many drivers will refer to sat navs to find quicker alternative routes and reduce journey time. In this case traffic is not being purposely diverted onto the Staffordshire network by Highways England, rather drivers are making a free choice on their chosen route.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By David Brookes

Question

“Would the Cabinet Member please outline the performance of the pot hole repairs within the County over the past three years?”

Reply

In 2017 Cabinet agreed a 4-year x £5m/year highway maintenance extra investment strategy to help tackle what was a growing number of potholes across the County. As well as an increase in pothole repair activity the strategy includes and ongoing investment in preventative maintenance treatments and targeted drainage improvements.

During 2019/20 the strategy is providing:

- £2m to enable an extra 9,000 pothole repairs;
- £2m to provide around 40 miles of additional low-cost pothole prevention surface treatments; and
- £1m towards additional drainage repairs, targeted at locations where poor drainage is leading to premature road surface deterioration.

As we now approach the end of the main road-repair season, in the 3rd year of this 4-year programme, I am pleased to report that the programme is proving to be a big success: At the start of 2017 there were around 12,000 identified or reported pothole defects on Staffordshire’s local road network; and today that number has been reduced to around 6,500. That is a reduction of around 45% in less than 3-years.

However, it is important to be clear that the number of potholes that repeatedly occur on our roads is a direct symptom of the level of capital ‘life-adding’ investment made each year through central government capital-maintenance grant. Staffordshire’s Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIMAP), identifies that the level of funding currently provided each year’s is only around half of what is currently needed. We are continuing to make our case to government and hope that some of the money recently announced for road infrastructure will find its way to local road maintenance.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 OCTOBER 2019

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

By Charlotte Atkins

Question

“The Cabinet Member and Leader know of the ongoing campaign by Perton Action for Safe School Travel (PASST) to ensure that appropriate transport options are in place for students going to and from local schools. Will the Cabinet Member and Leader meet with members of the group to discuss their concerns and help to find solutions to the current impasse?”

Reply

The authority is aware of the ongoing campaign of Perton Action for Safe School Travel (PASST). Their concerns were considered carefully by the county council during, and following, the conclusion of the stage 2 travel assistance appeal in December 2018.

The appeal concluded that the county council’s school travel policy and the law had been applied correctly, that there were no exceptional reasons why Perton should receive preferential treatment compared to other communities across Staffordshire and, therefore, that pupils who live below the statutory 3-mile walking limit were not entitled to free travel assistance.

Affected parents were advised that the county council’s two-stage review and appeal process had been exhausted and that the decision was final. Parents were advised of their right to complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and following a complaint, the LGSCO advised the authority, in September 2019, of their intention to investigate.

Given that the Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council support the appeal decision and that an LGSCO investigation is ongoing it would not be appropriate for us to meet with the action group until that independent process has reached a conclusion.

