

To: All Members and Officers of the County Council.

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Date: 14 October 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

County Council - Thursday 14th October 2021

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 14th October 2021 meeting of the County Council, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

9. **Questions (Pages 1 - 18)**

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 – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Cllr Pritchard

Question

The Governments On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme has allocated £20 million of funding in 2021 to 2022 financial year for local authorities to install on street EV charging points. The scheme covers 75% of the capital costs of procuring and installing the chargepoint infrastructure.

Will the Cabinet Member inform me how many applications the council is looking to submit, and would Staffordshire County Council look favourably at developing a bid for the Leys in Tamworth?

Reply

I am aware of the Governments On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme and this Council is currently developing it's own EV strategy to determine how it can best support the growth of electric vehicles in the future.

The installation of charge points on residential streets, to service homes that do not have off street parking, is a matter that is being carefully considered by many Local Transport Authorities and potential energy providers at the current time.

The availability of charging points in Staffordshire is slowly increasing due to many retailers making provision at end destination points. Before introducing additional street furniture, on certain roads in Staffordshire, we need to think carefully about the future considering the change to different vehicle fuels including electric vehicles and particularly the possible provision of a rapid charging infrastructure.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Philip White
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills**

By Cllr Charlotte Atkins

Question

What assessment has Staffordshire County Council made of the numbers of people in the County affected by the removal of the £20 uplift in Universal Credit and the impact this will have on them, with the rising costs of living, particularly of energy and food? What additional plans are in place to support vulnerable families struggling to make ends meet after this substantial cut in their household incomes?

Reply

Many people in Staffordshire have received the temporary uplift in Universal Credit and we are working with partners to understand the impact of ending this support. This includes the announcement last week from the Government that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. This new grant will run from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and totals over £5.5 million for Staffordshire.

At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.

A plan for this funding is currently being developed with partners, principally the Borough and Districts, but we expect that this will help people across Staffordshire who are unable to meet the costs for food, energy and water this winter.

Our work to grow employment has meant that the County historically has had low rates of unemployment and high employment rates which has meant that the claimant count is now 3.6% compared to 5.1% nationally. But during the pandemic we have continued our work to

support people to progress in work or find work, particularly the low paid and low skilled who have been most affected.

The County wide Redundancy Task Group has provided support to businesses and people to remain in work, upskill and reskill or secure new further employment opportunities. This includes helping to co-ordinate the Government plan for Jobs, promoting the Kickstart and restart schemes helping young people and adults find work. The Recruitment & Redundancy Triage Service has worked with over 2,000 people to find work or training. The Staffordshire Means Back to Business scheme in partnership with our District and Borough Councils provides over £5million to help start or business their grow, train their staff and recruit apprentices. Over £2million has been committed directly to businesses through the scheme creating over 200 apprenticeships and enabled over 200 businesses to upskill their workforce.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Jessel
Cabinet Member for Health and Care**

By Cllr Charlotte Atkins

Question

To what extent will the Government's proposed reforms and additional funding announced in September for adult social care:

1. ensure the County Council can fund its present and future demand for adult social care
 2. deal with workforce issues, such as, existing vacancies, poor pay and conditions
 3. have a differential impact in different English regions
 4. guarantee that no one needing care will have to sell their home to pay for it
 5. compare to the County Council's own 'Social Care Green Paper', which was being drafted some months ago?
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Reply

On 07 September HM Government announced a series of proposals for adult social care reform to be implemented from October 2023. These include:

- a. Raising the capital asset thresholds at which the state makes a contribution to the cost of people's care and support.
- b. Setting a 'cap' of £86,000 on the maximum contribution an individual makes to the cost of their care and support in a lifetime.
- c. Support for the workforce – including more training places, mental well-being resource, and recruitment / retention initiatives.
- d. Giving self-funders the option to ask their local authority to arrange their care and support, at local authority rates.

The intention is that these will be supported by a share of £36bn to be raised from a 1.25% increase in National Insurance for workers and employers.

Further details are awaited and therefore it is not yet clear what additional funding will be available, the timescales involved and any preconditions. As soon as further details are known, council members will be informed.

The reforms will benefit people who might otherwise face very high costs for care and support. Local authorities already pay the full cost of people's care and support once their capital assets fall below £14,250. Local authorities also offer deferred payments for people with higher capital assets to prevent people needing to sell their homes to pay for care and support.

Now that the Government has published its own proposals, with further proposals to be developed for adult social care, the County Council will no longer be pursuing its own Green Paper.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Price
Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND)**

By Cllr Hussain

Question

When children are hungry, they are unable to concentrate on their studies, which has a detrimental impact on their academic performance and affects their immune system later in life. What more can be done to ensure that children receive an uninterrupted balanced diet in their free school meals, as well as better value for money for those who pay for the food during the term, given that this is often the only major meal of the day for many children, and what strategy is in place to protect them from holiday hunger?

Since September 2014, children in Reception, year 1 or year 2 can receive free school meals even if they do not meet the entitlement criteria. For other ages, children have to meet the entitlement criteria set by the DfE in order to access a free school meal.

Food served in local authority maintained schools and academies must meet the school food standards so that children have healthy, balanced diets. The school food standards are to ensure that food provided to pupils in school is nutritious and of high quality; promotes good nutritional health in all pupils; protects those who are nutritionally vulnerable and promotes good eating behaviour.

A number of initiatives are currently underway to prevent Holiday Hunger, these include;

- **Holiday Activities and Food:** This is a scheme that was delivered for the first time in Staffordshire this year, but has seen thousands of children across the county access both activities and nutritious food during the holidays.
- **COVID Winter, Locality and latterly the Household Grant:** This scheme administered via LA's on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions has offered children across Staffordshire who access FSM access to supermarket vouchers throughout the holidays to ensure that children and their families have access to food throughout the holidays. We have supported families to make healthy meals using our videos and recipe cards online at [Family Hub Cooking | Staffordshire Connects](#)

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

By Cllr Hussain

Question

Local charities, community interest companies, and community organisations offered vital support to people during the pandemic. They have been found to be an excellent partner in our immunizations, testing, community cohesiveness, and assisting people in overcoming depression and loneliness, as well as women's education and empowerment, among other things. What plans does the council have to provide long-term assistance to these organisations?

Reply

The VCSE sector are a vital partner for Staffordshire County Council in helping our communities to prosper and be healthy and happy. This is evident in the crucial and ongoing role of the VCSE sector in supporting and mobilising our communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract, delivered by SCVYS and Support Staffordshire, has been in place since August 2016. Over the past 5 and a half years, this contract has provided support for the VCSE sector to be sustainable and grow. It has also played a vital role in working with the VCSE sector to help the Council deliver our strategic priorities, including Supportive Communities, Earliest Help, the Place Based Approach, and Staffordshire's offer for Young People. The relationships developed with SCVYS and Support Staffordshire through this contract were also vital in helping organise, support, and sustain the mobilisation of our communities across the pandemic.

The support delivered by the current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract will end on 31st July 2022. As set out in the Communities Delivery Plan 2021-22 (agreed by Cabinet in December 2020), work has begun to recommission this contract based on our learning from the past 5 and a half years and the Covid-19 response. These new arrangements will be due for further consideration by Corporate Overview

and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in the coming months, with a view to new arrangements being in place by 1st August 2022.

Through the pandemic we also developed a Community Champions approach in Burton which helped challenge myths around Covid and increased uptake in vaccines. This was a new approach to engagement and communication effectively with local communities. We are now building on this model working with local organisations, groups, individuals and businesses on issues that they identify as important. We are also supporting the Burton Champions to access training, better networking plus access to information advice and guidance. We plan to roll out this model incrementally across Staffordshire and more broadly we want to ensure everyone can find ways to encourage and support community action.

In addition, the County Council continues to ensure funding is available to support Staffordshire's local VCSE sector and help communities recover from Covid-19. Examples include the '2021 Community Fund' and future years of the Members fund, (which sees £2,500 available per year for each local county councillor to allocate towards projects or groups) and the 'Doing Our Bit Covid-19 self-isolator grant scheme' (grants to groups that can support those who have to self-isolate because of Covid-19). Looking further to the future we will also explore additional funding opportunities to continue to help support and grow this vital part of our communities.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Cllr Pardesi

Question

What is this Council's response to the former UN Special Rapporteur who recently said of our bus services that "deregulation has provided a master class in how not to run an essential public service"?

What does this Council have to say to those that the Rapporteur's report says "it found many people have lost jobs and benefits, faced barriers to healthcare, been forced to give up on education, sacrificed food and utilities and have been cut off from friends and family because of a costly, fragmented and inadequate privatised bus service that has failed them"?

Reply

I am aware of the report produced by Philip Alston, the former UN Rapporteur, where he comments on bus deregulation in Great Britain, introduced as part of the Transport Act 1985 some thirty-five years ago.

Although the setting of operational models for the provision of public transport in Great Britain is a matter for Central Government, clearly much has changed in those thirty-five years and we all need a public transport network that is fit for the future.

This Council has provided support for the local bus industry over the last difficult 18 months and is working closely with operators to help Staffordshire bus passenger figures return and hopefully exceed the pre Covid-19 figure of c15m passenger trips per year.

These bus trips help connect people to jobs, enable access to health care and education and link people to friends and family.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

Question to Cllr Philip White Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills

By Cllr Pardesi

Question

When local companies, farmers and small businesses face a possible crisis of rising energy prices, a supply chain problem and a worker shortage, what is this Council doing to support them?

Reply

Staffordshire County Council alongside a wide range of partners including the DWP, district and borough councils, HE, FE, and private companies has put in place a wide range of business, employment and skills initiatives to support the local businesses and residents in the recovery from the pandemic. This includes challenges around energy, supply chain and worker shortage.

Much of this activity is channelled through the Staffordshire Business Helpline. This is managed as part of the Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub. Staffordshire County Council is the accountable body and contributes resources to enable these to function.

In relation to energy, calls, emails and webchats come into the Business Helpline and Advisers signpost and refer businesses to the place where they will receive the most appropriate help and assistance to resolve their query. In the case of energy, they would be signposted to SBEN who would work to help them using the Low Carbon Evolution Programme - a project which provides the company with a two-day energy audit and then access to up to £20,000 of grant funding to assist in the purchase of equipment which will reduce their energy usage. The County Council provides funding to support SBEN.

Supply Chain issues have become a priority. In response the Growth Hub has agreed a partnership with the Manufacturing Growth Programme to run a pilot Supply Chain Programme which involves two workshops in October and January for up to 30 businesses in Staffordshire to look at ways to improve their supply chains, understand the importance of managing them effectively and de-risk supply chain issues through continuous improvement. 15 of these companies will also receive the

opportunity of an individual supply chain audit which will include a bespoke action plan for them. A report will be created after the audits to provide intelligence to the key partner organisations of the Growth Hub on the main issues facing Staffordshire businesses and supply chains.

Further support is available through the £5 million Staffordshire Means Back to Business Scheme. This provides funding and business support to SMEs in Staffordshire – including a COVID-19 recovery grants programme, investment to fund wages for apprentices and nil cost workforce training to help businesses take on new staff and upskill their existing staff. The Growth Hub also works closely with the Universities and Colleges as well as private training providers to ensure that workforce training is discussed with local businesses at every opportunity.

Worker shortage is also supported through the countywide Redundancy Task Group and the setting up of the 'Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service.' Here, jobs and careers specialists, from local advisors right up to and including the DWP and BEIS, have come together with local public, private and FE and HE sector partners, both to support individuals at threat of redundancy into work in new emerging growth sectors, and also support businesses experiencing extreme change themselves. The group has the experience, skills and business intelligence to move at pace, mitigate redundancies and support businesses experiencing growth to recognise and take on immediately available local people with the talent and transferable skills they need to realise their potential.

In summary, the County Council, with its partners, is working hard to support business working with the challenges of energy cost, supply chain and worker shortage.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Tagg
Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate
Change**

By Cllr Afsar

Question

Local climate grants from the previous year have a positive impact on larger climate change pledges that benefit the community. What is the future of the climate change grant to aid local efforts?

Reply

I am very pleased to hear that the Climate Change Action Fund, launched last November, has had a positive impact on your local community.

The next round of the fund will be launched at the Members Autumn Event being held next month on the 8th November.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture**

By Cllr Afsar

Question

Almost a month has passed since the County Council held a public consultation on the future of Burton Library. What was the result of the consultation? What were the conclusions reached as a result of the consultation?

Reply

The Consultation ended on the 10th September. In total, 1161 responses have been received. Detailed analysis of the consultation responses has yet to be completed. The intention is to pull together a full report on the consultation that will be presented to Cabinet on the 15th December.

