

To: All Members and Officers of the County Council.

DX 712320 Stafford 5

Fax No. (01785) 276219

Please ask for: Mike Bradbury

Telephone: (01785) 276135

e-mail: michael.bradbury@staffordshire.gov.uk

Date: 10 February 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

County Council - Thursday 10th February 2022

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 February 2022 meeting of the County Council, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

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

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 – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

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

By Cllr Pritchard

Question

Tamworth Public Footpath No.4 runs from Station Fields mobile home park, under the West Coast Main Line (on land owned by Network Rail) and alongside the River Anker to meet the new Anker Valley housing development in Tamworth.

With the influx of new residents to the area, this path offers an alternative and increasingly popular walking route to Tamworth town centre from the Anker Valley development. However, the path is being badly eroded in places and it is very muddy when wet. It is totally unsuitable for those who are less able or parents with prams. Network Rail are unwilling to hard surface the path in their ownership, so I ask if there is anything Staffordshire County Council can do to hard surface the path and provide residents with a much-needed traffic free route to Tamworth town centre?

Reply

“Thank you for your question. The path in question is a public right of way that runs between the mobile home park, beneath the railway and across to the new housing development. From a recent inspection of the route, it is clear that the path has received increased use since the development was constructed and the surface was wet and muddy in places, symptomatic of both the time of year and the increased usage. The section of unsurfaced path is just under 400 metres in length.

The Council’s Principal Rights of Way Officer has been in contact with Tamworth Borough Council on this matter as it seems strange that the path was not surfaced as part of the new development. I understand that there was discussion about extending the tarmac pathway to link in with Stationfields, however (as we understand it) there was a dispute between the landowners, one of which was Network Rail.

The Council’s Principal Rights of Way Officer is continuing to liaise with Tamworth Borough Council, and it is hoped that the issue can be resolved through planning measures.

It is possible to report issues relating to public rights of way via our website”

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

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

By Cllr Oates

Question

In a recent environment survey at www.TamworthConservatives.com/survey the number one concern of residents is litter and fly tipping, following a number of recent incidents near to and in Tamworth. Could the relevant portfolio holder inform the council as to what is being done to stop criminals fly tipping on our highways especially when highways are physically blocked by this activity?

Reply

Dealing with the abhorrent behaviour of fly-tipping requires partnership working between local authorities so as not just to move the problem from one location to another.

Across Staffordshire all the local Waste Collection Authorities monitor flying-tipping incidents and if appropriate this information can be requested and discussed at the Joint Waste Management Board (JWMB).

The Waste Collection Authorities are primarily responsible for the prevention, removal, and where possible prosecution for fly-tipping in all public areas within their respective Borough or District, including the public highway.

To help achieve this many borough and district councils already have active programmes that aim to educate residents about the right thing to do with their rubbish and to reduce the amount of household waste that is fly tipped by criminals who offer to take people's waste away for money and then dump it.

These campaigns aim to get the message across that if an individual's waste is fly tipped, even if they paid a third party to dispose of it, they can be prosecuted and end up with a fine and a criminal record.

Some borough and district councils also offer financial reward to anyone who provides evidence that leads to successful enforcement action against a person, business or organisation involved in fly-tipping.

The County Council, as waste disposal authority, would of course receive any such collected waste from the borough council and arrange for its disposal but this does come at a cost to the Council and therefore the Staffordshire taxpayer.

If fly-tipping is repeatedly obstructing or affecting the safe use of a particular section of public highway the Borough Council will need to work together with the County Council's highways team to explore appropriate additional local deterrent measures.

QUESTION 3

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

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

By Cllr Charlotte Atkins

Question

What is the role of the County Council in promoting good mental health? How has this role changed over the last five years? How have the County Council's mental health commissioning decisions been impacted upon by Covid and budget pressures?

Reply

The County Council has a role in improving mental health for the population as well as supporting people with assessed eligible needs for adult social care due to mental health problems. This role has not changed over the last five years.

The Council promotes mental health, for example the five ways to mental well-being:

- Connect with other people
- Be physically active
- Learn new skills
- Give to others
- Pay attention to the present moment

We also and signpost to a range of support in the community. We work with a range of partners to prevent suicide.

The Council commissions a range of care and support for people with assessed eligible needs for adult social care due to mental health problems. These include home care services that look after individuals in their own homes; Supported Living, which looks after groups of people in dedicated accommodation; and residential and nursing care homes. The total gross cost of these in 2021/22 is around £12m.

Like all adult social care services these have been affected by Covid with requirements for enhanced infection prevention and control measures and increasing difficulties with recruitment and retention. They have had additional funding during the pandemic with a share of £35m of Government Grants given to Staffordshire care providers in 2020/21 and 2021/22. Any fee uplift for next year will seek to recognise ongoing cost pressures whilst remaining affordable within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

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

By Cllr Pardesi

Question

The AA recently declared the pothole situation “a national emergency”. Underfunding is part of the problem. Does this Council accept that reducing funding on this issue and prioritising only the more problematic potholes is simply denying the seriousness of the situation and accumulating further problems for the future?

Reply

The current level of capital funding provided by government for local road maintenance each year is less than half of what is actually needed just to keep roads and footways in their current condition.

Until this funding situation improves potholes will continue to be an all-too-common problem.

Our current process for repairing potholes and other road defects is built on managing risk to the public, liability to the County Council and living within our means. As the increasing number of defects outstrips the resources needed to repair them the law is very clear that our repair teams must prioritise those that present the greatest risk to public safety.

This approach is actually the most efficient way of managing risk and liability, as well as being the most productive in terms of use of scarce resources. However, it is frustrating that our crews are having to repair individual defects rather than places, and that the repairs themselves can often only be described as ‘holding repairs’ – keeping a location safe, even sometimes repeatedly, until such time as the funding is made available to do the proper full-scale repair that is actually needed.

Prior to the COVID pandemic and in response to recommendations made by the Transport Select Committee in Nov 2019 the government had made a commitment to significantly increase funding for local road maintenance. In 2020/21 an extra 30% of capital funding was provided, which for Staffordshire equated to almost £9M extra. However, faced with the financial challenges of COVID the government has not been able

to repeat that commitment during 21/22 and funding for the next three years is expected to remain at the same reduced level.

That is why during 22/23 we will be investing an extra £15M of the council's own capital funding into local road maintenance.

This money will be used to:

- Tackle over 20,000 additional pothole repairs, significantly reducing the post-winter workstack;
- Pilot a new approach to 'right-first-time and single street repairs;
- Provide around 70 kilometres of additional pothole prevention treatments;
- Carry out around 200 drainage defect repairs; and
- Provide around 6Kms of road resurfacing schemes, replacing worn out road surfaces at key gateways across the county.

In addition, we'll also investing £2M of the council's own revenue, which will be used to:

- Increase the capacity of the council's highways contract management team, providing extra assurance on the quality of repairs that are carried out by contractors and ensuring that value for money is being achieved;
- As well as improving the ability to engage with local members to influence investment programmes and deliver community priorities.

This investment by the council is not going to solve the pothole problem. However, it will help to buy us time whilst central government continues to search for a long-term sustainable funding model for local road maintenance.

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 10 FEBRUARY 2022

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

By Cllr Hussain

Question

At my request, county council leaders donated dry food such as rice to struggling households, which was warmly accepted by the residents of Burton. Will the county council consider operating a similar programme in addition to the present assistance, given the growing cost of living and the fact that some families are experiencing similar hardships during this recovery stage?

Reply

The County Council and Partners, working together with organisations across the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector have previously provided packages of food and essential supplies to vulnerable families (with and without children). These initiatives were to respond to specific needs, including those identified during national restrictions for COVID-19. This external funding has now concluded, however in October 2021, the County Council welcomed the Government announcement of a new Support Fund (HSF) Grant which has been made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need during the winter.

Through the HSF, the County Council is facilitating the following Schemes:

- Education Support Fund (ESF): This Scheme provides approximately 26,900 children a £15.00 eVoucher for each week of the Christmas 2021, February 2022, and Easter School Holidays 2022. This Fund includes Children in receipt of means tested benefit related free school meals; Children in receipt of Think 2 funding; Children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium Funding; Children accessing alternative or independent education provision but identified in a household with financial exclusion and Staffordshire County Council Care Leavers.
- District Assistance Grants for Food and Essential Supplies: The County Council is administering Assistance Grants for Food and Essential Supplies using E-vouchers. Families facing substantial financial hardship are able to apply for an Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies. Families/vulnerable individuals are required to meet appropriate eligibility criteria before being considered for an Assistance Grant.
- Winter Warmth Project: Individuals and families struggling to pay their fuel bills, could get up to £350 worth of financial help. Grants will be

provided by pre-paid meter credit or paid directly to the resident's energy provider. The grants can be used to add credit to their account or to clear prior debt. If they are in an emergency situation and you do not have heating, or their heating has broken, we can deliver electric oil filled heaters to their home. They will also receive a Winter Warmth Pack (which includes hats, gloves scarves and hot flasks) for each individual who resides within house. Applications for this scheme are currently closed due to the volume we received.

- District & Borough Council Fund: The County Council is working with District & Borough Councils to support families with Council Tax Debt.

In addition to the above we also have the following that families can access:

1. Children's Centre staff have access to the foodbank online systems, this enables them to make referrals for support direct when families contact us needed help.
2. Staffordshire Connects has details of any financial support or discounted food available for families to access.
3. Staffordshire Children's Centres receive food donations from local supermarkets, these are made available to the vulnerable families locally.
4. We continually promote the Staffordshire County Council benefits checkers throughout our online social media, face to face through our service provision and when accessing any food support.
5. Referrals are made into the Family Support Providers where required when families are identified to support them with their finances.
6. Staffordshire Children's Centres work in partnership with the VCSE sector enabling us to access food supplies for families in emergency situations. As such we have been able to provide tailored food supplies that have been delivered direct to family homes taking into account dietary requirements.
7. The Early Years Coordination Service created the Family Hub Cooking project, please see here for more information [Family Hub Cooking | Staffordshire Connects](#). Staffordshire County Council has worked in partnership with Family Action to produce very simple recipes for families to try and that are low cost to make as well as weekly Free School Meal ideas and shopping lists. We then worked in partnership with our district partners to create YouTube Videos showing how to create the meals.