

To: All Members and Officers of the County Council.

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**Date:** 17 March 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

**County Council - Thursday 17th March 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 17th March 2022 meeting of the County Council, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

8. **Questions (Pages 1 - 14)**

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 – 17 MARCH 2022**

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

**By Cllr Pritchard**

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**Question**

Staffordshire will be hosting part of the Commonwealth Games, as well as most likely seeing the baton relay and other Commonwealth Games celebrations take place in the county. What will Staffordshire County Council be doing to ensure that there is a lasting health and sports participation legacy from the Commonwealth Games in Staffordshire?

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**Reply**

Staffordshire County Council (SCC) are committed to ensuring there is a lasting health and sports participation legacy for the Commonwealth Games. The following information are examples of where this work has already begun and how further work is underway to fulfil this commitment.

**Building the Legacy Forestry England Project for Commonwealth Games 2022**

SCC made an allocation of £50,000 and became a project partner working with Forestry England to deliver the legacy project building on from the Commonwealth Games. This involved the development, at Cannock Chase, of a Blue Trail Cycle track (aimed at intermediate level), a play centre for learning to ride and a full legacy programme to ensure the facilities have continued use and access by Staffordshire residents. Funding was allocated equally from Families and Communities and Health and Care budgets. Cannock Chase District Council also contributed financially to this project.

**Public Health**

For the past few months, we have been engaged with emergency planning, resilience, and response processes to ensure preparations are in place to consider potential threats from infectious disease (including, but not limited to, Covid) as well as environmental and other hazards. This includes proactive action, communication, and strategy to ensure a resilient and robust plan is in place to prevent and respond to any issues which may impact on public health. This work includes messages and distribution of condoms to promote safe/good sexual health.

SCC public health officers have recently engaged in a group led by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) which is focused on how to capitalise on promotion of physical activity/health and wellbeing as part of the Games legacy. Colleagues from Cannock District Council are also involved in this group, as well as Together Active, to review and consider physical activity and leisure opportunities related to the events being held in Staffordshire.

### **Together Active-Projects and Funding Opportunities**

#### **Commonwealth Games Small Grants Fund** (Administered by Together Active)

- £100,000 has been made available in Staffordshire & Stoke
- Grants of between £100 - £2,500
- Aims to use Sport And Physical activity to:
  - A. Bring people together
  - B. Improve health and wellbeing
  - C. Help the region to grow and succeed

#### **Generation 2022 – Volunteering programme for the Commonwealth Games** (Brokered by Together Active)

- Targeting young people who may not consider volunteering (those with Care experience, in pupil referral units or known to Youth Offending teams)
- Aged 16-24
- 30 hours of quality volunteering opportunities – incentivize by tickets to CWG &
- Sourcing placements that can provide formal qualifications and potential employment opportunities

#### **School Games Legacy Funding** (Administered by Together Active)

- Engage inactive young people through 'hook' of CWG
- £3,000 per School Games Organizer (SGO) area

#### **Places & Spaces funding** – Sport England

- Facility-based funding for sport and physical activity-based community organizations
- Up to £10,000 matched funding available

### **Communications**

A comms plan is being developed to ensure SCC work in partnership with the Organising Committee for the Commonwealth Games, OHID, and partners to promote the health benefits including mental and physical health attributed to the Games and Sports, therefore the overall legacy.

## QUESTION 2

### COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 17 MARCH 2022

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

By Cllr Pardesi

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#### Question

In light of current concerns over energy supplies, can this Council reassure residents that it will not support fracking being reconsidered under any circumstances?

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#### Reply

There is currently a moratorium on fracking in England. On 2 November 2019, the UK Government announced that it would “take a presumption against issuing any further Hydraulic Fracturing Consents” in England.

Details here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-ends-support-for-fracking>

The government is due to publish an energy security strategy imminently (possibly before this Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022 meeting), and a review of gas fracking could be among potential initiatives to help reduce reliance on imported hydrocarbons. However, there was no policy commitment to fracking by Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Monday as part of a roundtable of leaders in the UK’s offshore oil and gas industry.

Details here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/readout-of-prime-ministers-roundtable-of-uk-oil-and-gas-industry-leaders-14-march-2022>

In terms of where shale gas can be found in the UK, the British Geological Survey indicate that four areas have been identified as potentially viable for the commercial extraction of shale gas, and this includes the Carboniferous Bowland–Hodder area in north-west England (Lancashire and the Midlands).

Details here:

<https://www.bgs.ac.uk/geology-projects/shale-gas/shale-gas-in-the-uk/>

The extraction of shale gas in Staffordshire is unlikely to be commercial and/or considered a priority for shale gas exploration and our officers will keep both myself and the Planning Committee and members abreast of any change in national policy.

The Council has FAQ information relating to fracking published on our website, and this will be updated after Central Government publish their energy security strategy.

Details here:

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/planning/aZ/Fracking-in-Staffordshire-frequently-asked-questions.aspx>

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 17 MARCH 2022**

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

**By Cllr Charlotte Atkins**

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**Question**

What data does the County Council collect in respect of the provision of extra care and is that data publicly available? Does the County Council identify priority areas for extra care? If so, which criteria are used to determine these areas as a priority for extra care and why is that of importance to the County Council? What impact, if any, does a County Council designation as a priority area have on the future provision of extra care?

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**Reply**

Extra care provides housing with support, predominantly for older people. Support ranges from assistance with household tasks to regulated care.

In Staffordshire there are 23 extra care schemes providing regulated care that are known to the Council. We contract for care in ten of these for people who are eligible for Council funding. For contracted schemes a range of data is collected including the number of units available, the number of people receiving Council funded care, and the number of hours of care provided.

The Council has nomination rights to some of these schemes, which means that we have a first option when a unit becomes vacant. However, it is not always possible to find a Council funded individual who wants to move into extra care housing at the point the vacancy arises.

We are currently reviewing demand and supply of extra care, working with District and Borough Council housing colleagues and some of the larger extra care providers. This will help us to understand the areas where there is the greatest need for additional capacity. The findings will be included in the Care in the Home Market Position Statement, due to be published this summer, which should help extra care developers make decisions about new schemes. We will also consider a business case for the Council to support new developments in some areas.



**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 17 MARCH 2022**

**Question to Cllr Alan White  
Leader of the Council**

**By Cllr Oates**

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**Question**

Can the leader confirm that both he and Staffordshire County Council will be supporting Tamworth's bold and ambition application to become the home of GB Rail Headquarters? Given Tamworth's location in the country and at the crossing of two significant rail lines Tamworth's historic involvement in the railways makes it the perfect place to once again play a key role in the shaping of our nation.

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**Reply**

Thank you for your question. I can confirm that both myself and the County Council support Tamworth Borough Council's application to become the home of Great British Railways (GBRs) national headquarters. Tamworth's location on the national rail network provides excellent connectivity to other parts of the UK and makes it the ideal location for GBRs national headquarters. If successful, this bid will build upon the investment already secured from the Government's Future High Streets Fund to regenerate the town centre, bringing with it new highly skilled jobs and further investment for Tamworth helping to support our ambitions for Staffordshire's economy and the Government's levelling up agenda.



**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 17 MARCH 2022**

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

**By Cllr Hussain**

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**Question**

To store carbon, trees are the best of all possible options. What more can the Council do to ensure that tree planting on the county's own land in Burton and the county as a whole is as simple and efficient as possible?

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**Reply**

In our day-to-day services, the County Council actively manages or tenants nearly 8,000 hectares of land throughout Staffordshire, comprised of diverse habitats including woodland, heathland, country parks, county farms, regeneration sites, corporate estate and schools.

Notwithstanding the 3,800 miles of highway that we manage and its resource of an estimated 475,000 trees.

In the past few months, we have planted 17,500 trees over a couple of regeneration sites, making a valued contribution to reducing our carbon impact.

Staffordshire County Council has the expertise and opportunity to objectively identify areas within our portfolio, where we can have a positive effect with tree/woodland establishment.

Whether that be for carbon sequestration, nature recovery, air quality improvement, recreation, wellbeing or biodiversity, any strategy we undertake should realise as many benefits as possible, for any identified change in land use. Whilst maintaining the contribution that our rural portfolio adds to the communities and economy throughout our County.

With tree planting in mind, we should carefully consider the “right tree, for the right place”

All natural habitats can play a role in catching and storing carbon.

Woodlands achieve the highest rates of sequestration, but other habitats can store carbon that we need of offset, such as peat bogs, their improved condition can contribute to a vibrant and enhanced Countryside estate, as well as sequestering carbon.

For this reason, we are commissioning a study of county council land to understand its current carbon baseline (occupied or tenanted) to establish where, and how, we could increase carbon capture and storage. This might be by planting trees, but equally could be by restoring other habitats or other land management techniques.

The study will also look at additional benefits that such habitat enhancement could offer, such as natural flood management, wider biodiversity benefits, landscape enhancement, air quality and access improvements.

Through this we will be able to prioritise where we can achieve the greatest impact for both climate change mitigation, adaptation and nature recovery.

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 17 MARCH 2022**

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

**By Cllr Afsar**

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**Question**

Our County's Covid has had a disproportionate impact on certain communities. What more can the Council do to draw attention to long standing socioeconomic issues such as housing, male nutrition, low paying occupations, and child poverty especially during the current climate?

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**Reply**

It is important to the County Council that all Staffordshire residents have the opportunity to prosper.

Even before the pandemic we endeavoured to ensure that all those living in Staffordshire were able to have access to more good jobs and share in the benefits of economic growth. The County Council has worked hard to enable everyone to live in thriving and sustainable communities, and, in direct reference to your broad question; working with our partners – we strive to help our residents to live healthier, independent lives for longer. The pandemic, together, with the wider challenges that we are all facing, have brought many of the issues that you have raised into sharper focus. The County Council is already addressing many of these matters in practical ways.

We are working with our partners, such as the CCG, on several initiatives aimed at reducing health inequalities. This includes further development of our community champions programme and launching a programme of citizens enquiry to understand the views, behaviours and issues impacting on local people.

The existing healthy lifestyles service has been adapted throughout the pandemic to ensure continued support for local people around important issues such as smoking, weight management, NHS health checks, and workplace health. Part of this support has included expanding some of the eligibility criteria, as well as creating more flexible delivery models for services. As a sign of our ongoing commitment to this, we are in the process

of preparing to retender for this service - from Spring 2023, and the framework will allow for further focus and targeting of resources at those with the greatest health and care needs.

We are growing and developing our workplace health programme, linking it into networks such as the LEP and Chambers of Commerce, to better engage large and small employers; focusing on those settings with employees who tend to have poorer health outcomes and lower socio-economic groups for example - the unskilled, those in low paid jobs, manual workforces, and in specific reference to your question - male members of the wider workforce.

In terms of the socio and economic impacts of Covid-19, again there is a growing body of evidence that highlights that certain communities have been more adversely impacted by the socio-economic implications of Covid-19 than others.

The County Council has worked proactively to support all those in need of further assistance during these uncertain times. We are helping families through our Education Support Fund Scheme which provides nearly 27,000 eligible children with a £15.00 supermarket eVoucher per week out of term time. This scheme has been delivered every half term since October 2020 and will continue until Easter 2022. Alongside this there is support for families through the Household Support Grant for food and essential supplies for those facing substantial financial hardship.

The recent Staffordshire Covid-19 Survey, highlighted that younger residents, those unemployed or unable to work, and those with a disability, were most likely to have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. The County Council's efforts to transform the Staffordshire economy and reduce our reliance on low-wage, low-value industries over the last decade ensured, however, that we were well placed to remain resilient through the pandemic and rebound strongly afterwards.

Whilst challenges clearly remain, the delivery of local and national economic support measures since the start of the pandemic, alongside the vaccine rollout, have been hugely successful in averting the economic disaster that was predicted by many commentators, with GDP now already above pre-pandemic levels.

Through our Economic Recovery, Renewal & Transformation Strategy, the County Council delivered numerous projects and programmes to support those businesses and residents most adversely affected by the public health measures implemented over the last two years. These included an emergency grants scheme, the provision of PPE, support to start a business, and delayed rent payments at our Enterprise Centres to name just a few.

Through our Countywide Employment and Skills Task Group, the County Council continues to work with Government departments and local partners to support communities hardest hit by COVID and support those unfortunate to lose their jobs back into work. This includes enabling residents to reskill and upskill, thereby improving their career outcomes, pay and productivity to aid economic growth, increased prosperity, and better wellbeing. This work has contributed to the reduction in work-related Universal Credit claimants across all wards in Staffordshire during the last year.

Our hugely successful Staffordshire Means Back to Business programme, delivered in collaboration with all our District / Borough Council partners, is also continuing to deliver funding and support for businesses to recover and grow following the pandemic, to enable people to start their own business, to develop apprenticeship opportunities, and upskill employees. Many of these schemes were proactively targeted and promoted within areas where they were most needed and be of greatest benefit, including by local councillors.

Recognising that we are now in a far different and better place to what we might have been, it is the right time to set out our vision and ambitions for the Staffordshire economy in the coming years through our Strategic Plan and emerging Economic Strategy. This will require tackling a number of key challenges that remain, including that some parts of the county continue to lag behind.

All of our priorities will benefit communities across the county, such as our ambitions to transform our town centres and enable our residents to benefit from highly paid, high skilled jobs. We will continue to work with all our partners in delivering for communities across Staffordshire in the coming months and years, including with Government in achieving the ambitions set out within the Levelling Up White Paper.

This is supported by our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This identifies those wards with higher levels of need – for example with lower educational achievement, poorer health, and/or higher levels of crime.

We target our resources where possible to support those residents who most need our help, for example the Warmer Greener home programme which has funded heating and insulation for more than 500 of our poorest households.

We will continue to do our best to 'level up' the county, working with partners and communities and recognising that this is a long-term endeavour that requires action by national government, local agencies and the public.

