

Date: 16 March 2023

County Council - Thursday 16th March 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

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 16th March 2023 meeting of the County Council, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed:

- Questions

John Henderson
Chief Executive

Enc



Question No. 1

County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023

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

By Councillor Pritchard

Question

In Perrycrofts Division there is a stretch of road that carries a huge amount of Tamworth's daily traffic. The road, known as Upper Gungate, frequently suffers from potholes due to the volume of daily traffic. The road has just had more temporary repairs to address the latest batch of potholes. Can I ask the authority to consider this stretch of road for a complete resurface as soon as funding becomes available?

Reply

Yesterday, 15 March 2023, Cabinet approved the annual Highways and Transport capital programme for 2023/24.

As part of that decision Cabinet announced an additional £30m of capital investment in local road maintenance will be made over the next two years, together with provisional list of priority locations for maintenance treatment.

Amongst that list of priorities £900k is allocated for structural maintenance and resurfacing of both A513 and B5493, Upper Gungate and Aldergate in Tamworth.

Precise details of the extent and timing of these works will be available shortly once the design is complete and co-ordination with any nearby local developments, planned upgrades to private utility infrastructure and any other local events has been confirmed.

County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023**Question to Councillor Alan White
Leader of the Council****By Councillor Hood**

Question

During the construction of the Stone Railhead, HS2 intends to use Pirehill Lane as a Haul Road for up to 42 HGV's a day carrying heavy loads to its Yarlet embankment satellite compound. In the immediate area there are two first schools, a middle school and three nurseries where families are told road safety is a priority and are encouraged to walk their children to school helping reduce their carbon footprint. It is a heavily populated residential area leading to the Eccleshall Road which is heavily congested, added traffic will be a hazard to the surrounding area and its users. Air quality will soon deteriorate with queueing traffic and will threaten the environment and health of residents. Could the Leader intervene and persuade HS2 to find an alternative route?

Reply

Pirehill Lane was identified as a lorry route by HS2 Ltd in the Environmental Statement, which was published when the High Speed Rail (West Midlands to Crewe) Bill was deposited with Parliament in July 2017. During the Bill phase, all proposed lorry routes were reviewed and scrutinised by officers and the Council supported local communities and individuals with their petitions to Parliament. The Bill secured Royal Assent and became an Act in February 2021. The Act provides limited grounds for the Council to refuse a lorry route, these being: road safety; amenity; free flow of traffic; and historic environment. In addition, there must be a viable alternative route available.

Officer discussions with HS2 Ltd have highlighted that the current Pirehill Lane proposal is not suitable. It is recognised however that a lorry route is required for construction works in the local area that will enable a haul road to the A34 near Yarlet to be constructed.

Officers will continue to engage HS2 Ltd and the main works contractor (once appointed) on detailed matters relating to lorry routes in this area. The Council will advocate for the local community and urge HS2 Ltd and its contractors to find the best solution within the constraints of the Act.

Following the Government's announcement on 9 March that construction on HS2 Phase 2a will be rephased by 2 years, the Council is seeking urgent clarification on the implications to the main works Schedule 17 lorry route approval process and timescales.

County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023**Question to Councillor Tagg
Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate
Change****By Councillor Yates**

Question

I am very concerned about the increase in fly tipping incidents around my division, invariably these are small quantities of building debris, including bricks, concrete, and plaster.

Can you please confirm the annual gross and nett proceeds for these charges imposed at my local recycling centre (Bemersley Road), so that I can undertake a cost versus benefit calculation taking into account fly tipping management charges incurred at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council?

Reply

The 14 Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) Staffordshire network provides a valuable service to residents to enable the recycling of some 42 different household material streams.

Since November 2016 the HWRC service has allowed residents to deposit non-household waste (which is a non-statutory function) for a modest fee which contributes to actual disposal costs. A report was considered by the relevant scrutiny committee in 2018 which evidenced that the introduction of charges had had no material impact on fly tipping activity in Staffordshire.

In addition, with the exception of the Biddulph HWRC, commercial waste is accepted at all other Staffordshire HWRC's for a fee to cover disposal costs. It should be noted that this is also a non-statutory function. Numerous commercially operated waste sites are also available in Staffordshire for the disposal of commercial waste.

Fly tipping is an illegal activity and is monitored by District and Borough Councils. We have had no reports of an increase in fly tipping in the

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council area, but we are always willing to work with District/Borough Councils to prevent illegal fly tipping activity.

County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023**Question to Councillor Phillip White
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills****By Councillor Pardesi**

Question

The Government is keen to get people, who have been inactive, back to work after the pandemic to fill job vacancies. Has the County Council had difficulty filling job vacancies? If so, in which roles? Which employment incentives are most likely to encourage people back to work in Staffordshire?

Reply

Like many other local authorities and large employers across the country, Staffordshire County Council experiences regular staff turnover, which is partly reflected in the number of recruitment adverts we place as an organisation.

There has been considerable effort over the last 18 months to create a more distinctive profile for the County Council reflecting its status as a modern and forward looking employer with the introduction of **'WeRecruit'** our new applicant tracking system and our revamped careers website.

Over the last year the County Council has placed 956 adverts and advertised more than 1500 positions, and, whilst some of these positions will have been filled by internal candidates, we have appointed almost 750 new starters.

Since the launch of the 'WeRecruit' platform on 31st October, from a total of 211 appointments, 63 (or around 30%) were taken by internal applicants, with around 70% of recent appointments taken by new starters.

We currently average around 10 applicants per vacancy although find it difficult to recruit to certain roles such as social workers and lawyers, in common with many other local authorities.

Focusing in particular on lawyers, we operate in an exceptionally competitive market place where the private sector is often able to offer

higher remuneration, and more recently than in the past, can now compete with the County Council around a flexible work offer.

Working with the People Services team our Legal Services team has developed '**Brand Legal**' using feedback we had received that we had not always highlighted the exciting scope of services and work available within a local authority legal service.

This alongside modernisation of job descriptions will enable us to facilitate options for staff to transfer more easily between legal disciplines which will promote individual development and make us more resilient to changing demands from our client base.

Ensuring that we are competitive within the wider recruitment market is crucial to ensuring we are properly resource. Using market rates wider intelligence we are creating talent pools in conjunction with our People Services team and we have had great success in recently appointing a number of Educational Psychologists and a substantial number of Social Workers over the past 12 months.

We strongly believe in growing our own people and looking to the future, we are working with People Services to design relevant apprenticeship plan and job descriptions to open up pathways for new entrants to the County Council. For example in our legal services team we take students from further education and support them, in five to six years, to qualify as lawyers.

This approach to growing our own will help us in ensuring that we are able to recruit the very best talent available, including from those cohorts who have traditionally not had university as an option that they feel is open to them.

Through our Open Door programme, we continue to successfully encourage people who are out of work into the labour market through structured 12 week voluntary placements many of which are within the County Council, giving people the confidence and skills they need to enter the world of work. In the two full delivery years of pre-pandemic Open Door delivery (2018-20) the Council supported 136 candidates with 31 (23%) gaining employment. Following the pandemic, the Open Door programme has seen 39 candidate starts since April 2022 and with 8 of these gaining full-time employment and the interest in the programme continues to grow.

Our structured approach to training and development helps us to retain our staff and grow their skills and rising through the business. We're seeing a positive increase in the number of people who are likely to recommend SCC as an employer, with our Net Promoter Score increasing from +11 in Q4 of 2021/22 to +19 in Q1 of 2022/23 which is considered a good score.

The top positive themes arising from the most recent eNPS results indicate that employees value the support and encouragement they receive from their line manager and senior manager; that the workplace is a friendly and warming environment, and that the council has a very positive culture.

In addition, the January 23 SMART survey demonstrated a direct positive connection between smart working and our ability to recruit and retain people as it enables us to draw from a much wider pool of people. Flexibility in our work offer is considered a highly attractive feature of working for the council.

Staffordshire as a whole, performs better than many areas in terms of Economic Inactivity rates which in the latest data (October 2021 to September 2022) stood at 16.3% of the working age population compared to 21.2% in England.

Similarly our Employment Rate (81.0%) and Unemployment Rates (3.3%) from the same data series are also better than the England averages.

Recognising the link between job vacancies and activities to bring people back into work, our new Staffordshire Jobs & Careers brokerage service is now fully live and currently staffed by a team of 6 dedicated Employment Brokers. This service is designed to match local people with employer vacancies, to fill jobs and provide people with the jobs and careers they need. It is responsible for the management and delivery of free recruitment and support services to businesses, supporting Staffordshire residents into work. The team is now ready to help with tailored support and practical help. Their job is to help put together and support clients with a bespoke package of support for the right job, career, and training path for them, working with and alongside our partners.

The Staffordshire Jobs & Careers service website is a comprehensive single point that provides information on jobs, training, and career opportunities all in one place. The website has become quickly established since launching in November 2022 and it is currently promoting around 12,000 job vacancies and continues to grow in usage with 6,546 website engagement activities doubling during January 2023 to February 2023, resulting in 10,620 page views.

The brokerage service also supports wider government programmes such as DWP's Plan for Jobs, and it will also target the linking of opportunities with key employment sites such as the West Midlands Railfreight Interchange in South Staffordshire, HS2, i54 Western Extension and recent investments such as the Pets at Home Distribution Centre in Stafford.

The County Council, supported by the 8 District and Borough Councils, invested £6.9m on the 'Staffordshire Means Back to Business' programme that supported businesses and residents through the pandemic. This programme delivered: 418 new Apprentices, 321 companies supported with free training, 187 businesses supported through the business start-up/step up programmes, 28 start-up loans made, and 13,500 students received training in starting a business.

Other factors which can influence economic inactivity include the cost of childcare, meaning that some low-income families can find themselves worse off in work, and also delays in NHS waiting lists, exacerbating health conditions among the population and potentially removing people further from the labour market. These are of course national issues, but we should note their potential impact on local economic activity.

County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023**Question to Councillor Price
Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND)****By Councillor Charlotte Atkins**

Question

What assessment has the County Council made of the financial viability of the private nursery education provision in Staffordshire? Is the new nursery education funding rate of £4.52 per hour sufficient to meet the escalating costs of nurseries delivering up to 30 hours a week for three and four year olds in Staffordshire? What support is the County Council offering the sector?

Reply

The County Council currently has not carried out any financial viability, this is because a national study of all early education funded childcare was conducted to establish the national funding formula. In addition the scale of this study due to the complexity of the market for example, there are differing provider types with significantly differing overhead costs would be extremely challenging.

We do however meet with the Early Education Reference Group and the sector more broadly. We understand that the sector is facing rising costs which mean that the hourly rate they receive through the early education entitlements can feel lower.

- Living wage increases
- General inflation
- Energy and food prices
- Rent increases
- Increase in cost of consumables
- Reduction in private income as parent requirements change
- Recruitment and retention issues

The Local Authority has to operate within a National Funding Formula. We are mandated to pass out a minimum of 95% funding for 3- and 4-year-olds to settings. In recognition of the increased costs identified by the sector above the County Council has ensured a budgeted funding pass-through rate of 96.2% to providers of the 3- and 4-year-old allocation.

Staffordshire however is a low funded authority and therefore this may still feel insufficient to local providers and we are raising this issue with the Department for Education both regionally and nationally and via the LGA.

In addition any early years provider who claims early education funding is able to request support visits from one of our Sufficiency and Market Development Officers. The team provide advice and guidance bespoke to the setting context regarding matters such as:

- Marketing and promotion
- Sustainability
- Recruitment and Retention
- Setting up new childcare
- Early Years Entitlements
- Suitability of premises
- Governance
- Staffing
- Leadership and Management
- Accessing funding such as EYPP and DAF

We would like to offer any setting who is struggling this support so please tell them to get in touch if they are facing challenges.

County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023**Question to Councillor Jessel
Cabinet Member for Health and Care****By Councillor Hussain**

Question

What additional steps can be taken in the area of social care to assist care workers in establishing an effective career path and feeling satisfied at work?

Reply

On 18 January Cabinet endorsed the Staffordshire Social Care Workforce Strategy. This has been co-produced by the Council, NHS, Local Economic Partnership, Skills for Care, local providers and other partners. This sets out how we will develop a more resilient care sector that enables more effective recruitment and retention by:

- a. Improving the usage of updated data and intelligence as a shared resource to support the social care workforce.
- b. Promoting available resources to providers more effectively and engage with providers who need the most support to use those resources.
- c. Developing an improved journey into work
- d. Implementing a co-ordinated partnership approach to learning and development
- e. Improving the positive recognition of social care as a valued career
- f. Increasing the level of capability to use digital and technology innovations.
- g. Supporting improved practice across the sector in recruitment and business continuity planning
- h. Seeking to reduce travel costs where possible across the partnership.

To improve the positive recognition of social care as a valued career we intend to:

- a. Develop and implement support networks for key leadership roles, supported by partners across the health and care system.
- b. Identify and progress reductions in bureaucracy where this does not adversely affect safe and effective care.

- c. Across local and national networks, make the case for promoting social care as a valued career, and for a fair and sustainable funding approach for the sector.
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County Council Meeting – 16 March 2023**Question to Councillor Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture****By Councillor Afsar**

Question

Outdoor walking and hiking in various streets, hills and open spaces are effective activities for the fight against obesity, isolation and mental health illnesses. What more can the County Council do to make these activities more popular with residents?

Reply

SCC is collaborating with a range of agencies (including Together Active) to develop partnership approaches in each of the districts and boroughs that focus on healthy eating and physical activity – known as **Better Health Staffordshire**, more information can be found here: [Better Health Staffordshire - Staffordshire County Council](#)

This is a relatively new initiative that is designed to operate over the long term – while there are no quick fix solutions, there is a huge range of opportunities across the county to encourage people to be more active. The plan is to work in partnership with those people who understand their communities best to maximise current facilities (leisure centres etc.) and resources (green spaces etc.) – not least by raising awareness of what is available and motivating people to take part by making activities easier to access and more enjoyable.

The **Environment & Countryside Service** promote access to Staffordshire's countryside estate of approximately 6000 acres of [country parks, open spaces and greenways](#), together with a [public rights of way](#) network of approximately 2500 miles. A series of [country trails and promoted routes](#) are available to encourage use of the path network which include a series of circular walks centred on the Staffordshire Way.

SCC are the Lead Authority for the [Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#) partnership (AONB) **Cannock Chase AONB**. We promote walks for people to get out and about to explore the AONB, as part of our forthcoming 'Walking Cannock Chase' series. Partners provide activities for the local community and visitors to improve their physical and mental

wellbeing. For example, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles with Chase Fit in Cannock Chase District and the Friends of Cannock Chase provide a programme of guided walks.

The AONB is a partner with the **Wayfinding Project** led by Together Active, seeking to improve access for residents of North Hednesford to Cannock Chase, particularly those with health conditions and disabilities.

Our **Libraries & Arts** team promote local history walks from some libraries and are currently working with the AONB to develop information packs for children to encourage families to access Cannock Chase for well-being.

To encourage residents to access the outdoors, our activities are promoted via a range of communication channels: e.g. website, e-newsletters and social media. However, we will continue to work with our partners and our communications team to raise awareness of activities which promote healthy lifestyles.
