

Date: 17 May 2023

County Council - Thursday 18th May 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 18th May 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 – 18 May 2023

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

By Councillor Pritchard

Question

I have been promoting the use of the MyStaffs mobile device app to residents, it has come to my attention that the current version cannot be installed using the latest android software. Could the portfolio holder please ensure that the App is updated so that it can be downloaded universally across commonly used hardware platforms, and a “test and review” procedure is introduced to ensure that the compatibility of the App keeps pace with device software upgrades.

Reply

On the 22nd of March 2023 Google and Apple updated their terms and conditions and subsequently required us to undertake a review of the data captured by the MyStaffs App and re-apply to be listed on the Google Play Store and Apple App Store. This work was carried out and the MyStaffs App was successfully relisted. Testing was undertaken to check it was working on Android and Apple devices and no issues were identified.

This is the first issue that has been raised with us on this and officers are now investigating and working to resolve it. Once we have identified the problem and it’s cause we will ensure that this doesn’t happen again. In the interim all the services provided by the MyStaffs App are still available via the Council’s website.

County Council Meeting – 18 May 2023**Question to Councillor Alan White
Leader of the Council****By Councillor Pritchard**

Question

Just two weeks ago Staffordshire was united in celebration of the coronation of our new monarch, His Majesty King Charles III.

Street parties and celebrations took place across Staffordshire, including in Tamworth town centre and Borough Road in my Division.

Local businesses also got involved by decorating their premises and holding events.

Clare Lee, at the Tam O Shanter in my division, threw open her doors to host a free family fun day for the local community.

Would the Leader join me in congratulating everyone who made these wonderful events happen for the coronation, including by community champions like Clare Lea at the Tam O Shanter?

Reply

It was fantastic to see people, businesses and organisations all over Staffordshire coming together to celebrate the coronation, once again emphasising the community spirit, patriotism and pride people take in their local areas.

So yes, I would also pay tribute to and congratulate Clare Lea and everyone who contributed to another memorable weekend, hot on the heels of our latest Staffordshire Day celebrations.

Over the last four weeks the county council counted down to the coronation across our social media channels and through the media, promoting local events and street parties, and the array of volunteering as part of the Big Help Out.

Our libraries marked the occasion with a giveaway of commemorative bookmarks and wildflower seeds. And we will be giving every Staffordshire

baby born on 6th May a commemorative mug – we are inviting their parents to an event here in county buildings in the coming weeks.

County Council Meeting – 18 May 2023**Question to Councillor David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport****By Councillor Pardesi**

Question

When will it be accepted that it is not sustainable to expect Amey alone to deliver in a timely fashion?

Reply

The highways service already uses a range of different providers, including EoN for street lighting, SWARCO for traffic signals, a number of Borough and District Councils for grass cutting and other environmental maintenance activities, and of course Amey for a wide range of day-to-day operational activities. Furthermore, the Amey workforce is typically made up of around a 50/50 mix of directly employed local operatives and a wide range of local subcontractors. Around 85% of all expenditure through the Amey contract remains within Staffordshire and neighbouring authority areas.

Working in partnership with a tier 1 national provider like Amey provides the county council many benefits, including added Resilience, Scale of Economy and Buying Power. It means that when additional funding becomes available, like it did last summer when Cabinet committed to the first year of £15m extra investment to fix more roads, we are well placed to respond quickly and competitively to bring on-board the extra capacity needed to ensure delivery and value for money for our residents.

With the extra investment being made by the county council over the next two years extra sub-contract resources will again be brought in. These include specialist resurfacing and surface treatments teams, extra pothole repair teams - including the specialist velocity patcher and thermal patching techniques, continuation of the additional Member priorities gully emptying team and additional drainage repair teams.

It's also worth mentioning that as part the ongoing Highways Transformation Programme we are currently moving to a new Hybrid-Mixed-Economy operating model. Whilst retaining the benefits of having a Tier 1 strategic delivery partner the new model will also provide the council

with much greater control and assurance of the highway service. Under the new model each separate function, from carriageways to footways and from drainage to winter gritting, will each have its own politically agreed budget, service level, specification and performance requirements, including Quality, Customer Service and Value for Money. Delivering on Members priorities will be a key design feature of the new model.

Cabinet have reviewed the options and agree that the fastest, most efficient way to transition and start to realise the benefits of this new model is to extend our relationship with Amey – but on very different contracting terms:

- a. Under the new arrangement a lot of inspection, works prioritisation and quality assurance activity has already been moved back in house and is now being managed directly by the council;
- b. And even though it's a 5-year contract – under the new arrangement Amey are not guaranteed any work. If any element of activity is under-performing, or we feel things can be done better in a different way, then we retain the freedom to move functions into new arrangements, for example in-house or through a new delivery partner.

Amey have recently been sold and their new owners are really excited and want to work with us on innovative new solutions. They like the look of this new model and are confident it will help them to demonstrate to us and others in the sector the added value they offer.

All that being said even with infinite resources and the best possible delivery model available, we still can't always do everything as quickly as we would like to. Roadworks are, by their very nature, disruptive. Our own operations actually only make up only about 1/3rd of all activity that takes place on the road network, with utility providers, including the major fibre roll out, making up the majority of the rest. It takes careful management to plan and co-ordinate activity to minimise delays and prevent as far as possible traffic diverting on to inappropriate local routes.

Despite these challenges fixing more roads is a priority for this council. I along with all other Cabinet Members and the highways team really appreciate the support from local members in helping us to achieve this goal.

County Council Meeting – 18 May 2023**Question to Councillor Jonathan Price
Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND)****By Councillor Charlotte Atkins**

Question

What assessment has the County Council made of the impact of the National Tutoring Programme in Staffordshire to help young people struggling to catch up after the disruption to their schooling caused by Covid lockdowns? How many pupils received tutoring under the scheme last year in Staffordshire and in which schools? What is the predicted take up of such tutoring in 2023 now that the government subsidy has been cut from 60% to 25%? Has the attainment gap for GCSEs in Staffordshire widened for disadvantaged pupils?

Reply

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) provides primary and secondary schools with funding to support targeted academic support, delivered by trained and experienced tutors and mentors. The overall approach to the NTP in the 2022 to 2023 academic year is to allow schools to design and deliver a tutoring offer that suits the needs of their school and pupils. The DfE has provided schools with a range of information to support them in delivering this programme.

Over 75% of pupils (85% in schools deemed secondary) are now being educated within academies which are no longer under the control of the local authority. It is for schools and academies to evaluate the impact of their tutoring programme, and as part of their evaluation of the quality of education and leadership and management, Ofsted inspectors will consider how schools make effective use of tutoring.

The virtual school has been working with school to use the funding to provide tuition support for the pupils in care, working with relevant schools as necessary. The additional tutoring is reviewed as part of the pupil's personal education plan (PEP).

The local authority has provided funding to independent special schools to enable them to provide tutoring for eligible Staffordshire pupils.

Attainment 8

In 2022, Staffordshire disadvantaged pupils Attainment 8 score increased by 0.9 points from 2019, which was in line with the increase seen nationally.

Pupils achieving GCSE Grade 5+ in E+M

In 2022, Staffordshire disadvantaged pupils achieving GCSE 5+ in E+M increased by 5 percentage points from 2019, this was in line with the increase nationally which also increased by 5 percentage points.

County Council Meeting – 18 May 2023**Question to Councillor Tagg
Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure
and Climate Change****By Councillor Hussain**

Question

Plant trees to make the world a better place. We must do more. Can the Cabinet Member tell us that he would go to whatever length to promote tree planting, particularly after plantation care? Unfortunately, many plants are destroyed within the first few months after being planted. What more would he do to guarantee a long-term tree planting and balanced tree growth?

Reply

The benefits of trees are wide and varied from slowing down flood pressures and ensuring that we enhance biodiversity, the benefits of trees are felt for generations.

As part of our commitment to reduce the Councils carbon emissions, we are exploring where potential lies to plant trees and diversify habitats to sequester carbon dioxide and mitigate some of our carbon footprint.

Over the past couple of years we have planted thousands of native trees on our land.

Whilst tree planting is a hugely beneficial act, we need to be mindful in balancing the various demands on our countryside for the benefit of our communities.

Whenever trees are planted, a balanced and proper maintenance programme should be entered into. However, sometimes unforeseen circumstances such as last years unprecedented heatwave catch even the most experienced land managers out.

With climate change in mind and the increased pressures that our natural environments is under from weather extremes and increased attacks from plant pathogens, diseases, and pests, we need to carefully consider the resilience of any decision we take to plant trees.

County Council Meeting – 18 May 2023**Question to Councillor David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport****By Councillor Afsar**

Question

On a regular basis myself as a County Councillor receives complaints from residents regarding claiming for damages to motor vehicles due to faulty Highways issues and uneven pavements / trip hazard injuries. Can I have the latest data for insurance claims made and paid out because of Highways claims and personal injury?

Reply

The existence of a highway defect does not in itself constitute a legal liability on the council. The courts have accepted that Highway Authorities cannot be on hand at all times to repair or put right each and every defect or remove every piece of debris the moment it arises on the road. Instead, highway authorities should have a reasonable regime in place to identify and action safety defects in a timescale corresponding to the level of risk they pose to highway users.

To meet this duty like most other Local Highway Authorities we inspect all roads, footways and cycleways at regular intervals. The public can also report safety defects directly to the council online or through the MyStaffs app. Identified defects are risk assessed and given an order of priority for repair.

The council is only liable where it has failed to maintain these systems and processes or where the timescale for completing the repair exceeds that assigned for the level of risk. This is why, especially during and immediately after the winter season, crews are often fully utilised attending to higher risk category 1 and 2 defects, and return at a later date to deal with lower risk category 3 defects.

Highway claims data for the last 5-years shows that during this period an average of around 1,600 third-party highway claims have been received by the council each year. The council's successful repudiation rate is around 70%, meaning that on average less than 500 claims are accepted each year with a total cost in the order of £1.25m/year.

The extra £30m being invested in road repairs over the next two years is expected to further improve this picture. This will allow more repairs to be carried out within legal timescales, helping to further reduce the risk of personal injury and property damage claims.

On top of repairing around 30,000 potholes each year this extra £30m investment will:

- enable five more major road reconstruction schemes at key locations into our towns;
- the resurfacing of nine junctions/roundabouts;
- an extra 800,000 sq.m of pothole prevention surface treatments; and
- additional work to repair and improve many old highway drainage systems.

Central Government have also recently announced further funding of over £4.8M to fix more roads and of this £2M will be used to repair local County Councillor led prioritised pothole repairs.

Fixing more roads is a top priority for the Council. We want the people of Staffordshire to see an improvement in our highways over the next few years and are most grateful for help from the public who can report specific highway defects to us online and through the MyStaffs app - helping with the planning and co-ordination of efficient and effect repairs.
