

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 10 October 2019

Present:

Attendance		
Ben Adams	Phil Hewitt	David Smith
Charlotte Atkins	Jill Hood	Paul Snape
Philip Atkins, OBE	Syed Hussain	Bob Spencer
Ann Beech	Julia Jessel	Mike Sutherland
David Brookes	Trevor Johnson	Mark Sutton
Gill Burnett	Bryan Jones	Stephen Sweeney
Ron Clarke	Dave Jones	Simon Tagg
Tina Clements	Jason Jones	Carolyn Trowbridge
Maureen Compton	Ian Lawson	Ross Ward
John Cooper	Alastair Little	Alan White
Mike Davies	Johnny McMahon	Philip White
Derek Davis, OBE	Paul Northcott	Bernard Williams
Mark Deaville	Jeremy Oates	David Williams
Alan Dudson	Ian Parry	Victoria Wilson
Janet Eagland	Kath Perry	Mark Winnington
Ann Edgeller	Jeremy Pert	Susan Woodward
Keith Flunder	Bernard Peters	Mike Worthington
Colin Greatorex	Jonathan Price	
Gill Heath	Kyle Robinson	

Apologies for absence: Helen Fisher, John Francis, Michael Greatorex, Keith James, Natasha Pullen, Martyn Tittley and Conor Wileman

PART ONE

25. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

The following Members declared an interest in accordance with Standing Order 16.5:-

Member	Minute Nos.	Interest	Reason
Susan Woodward	28	Personal	Trustee of Chasewater Friends
Phil Hewitt	28	Personal	Member of Heath Hayes Parish Council and Member of Chasewater Friends

26. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 July 2019

The Director of Corporate Services referred to Minute No. 20 (Members' Allowances Scheme – Independent Remuneration Panel Report) and indicated that, following the Council Meeting on 25 July, a question had been raised with him as to whether the

Panel's recommendations had been adopted in part (as detailed in the draft minutes) or in full, and he sought clarification from Members on this matter. On consideration of this matter it was agreed that the draft minutes accurately reflected the decisions of the Council.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 25 July 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

27. Chairman's Correspondence

Members' Long Service Awards – Simon Tagg

The Chairman informed the Council that, since 1985, the County Council had recognised the service of its Members who had completed 12 years (ie three full terms of office) through the presentation of a Long Service Award. Mr Tagg first became a member of the County Council in 2007 and had served on the Council since that date. The Chairman presented Mr Tagg with his award in recognition of the contribution he had made to the work of the council over the past 12 years.

Former Corporate Director (Change) – Colin Savage

The Chairman informed the Council of the death, on 29 September 2019, of Colin Savage Dip Arch, RIBA.

Mr Savage joined the County Council on 1 September 1987 as the Council's County Architect. Following a reorganisation in 1992 he became Director of Property Services.

In the mid 1990s Mr Savage led the County Council's team on Local Government reorganisation and afterwards the transfer of services to the City of Stoke-on-Trent. A further County Council reorganisation in 1997 saw him become Director of Corporate Services as adviser to the Policy and Resources Group of Committees and Head of the Corporate Services Division.

In 1998, following a further reorganisation, Mr Savage was appointed Director of Cultural and Corporate Services. This reorganisation merged together Libraries, Arts and Archives, the Countryside Division and Shugborough, Property Services, Waste Management, Registration, Rent Office and Public Relations.

Following the appointment of Nigel Pursey, in 2003 he became Corporate Director (Change), assisting the Chief Executive in managing the change process. Mr Savage retired from the County Council in 2004.

Mr Atkins and Mr Davis paid tribute to Mr Savage for the contribution he had made during his employment with the Council.

28. Statement of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council. In introducing his statement, the Leader also informed the Council of the following additional matters:

- **A521 Programme to Support New Homes by St Modwen**

As those of you who represent Staffordshire Moorlands will know, highways work began on important scheme on Monday to support a housing development by St Modwen near Blythe Bridge

This was a challenging scheme, but our engineers worked closely with St Modwen, its contractors, local councillors and local communities to find a workable solution.

I am pleased to say that after listening to comments and pouring over the designs once again, a compromise was found which although will take a little longer will keep the A521 partially open, rather than closed for 10 weeks.

- **National award for Sam Bailey**

As a rural county we are immensely proud of our farming heritage and Sam Bailey is one of those who is helping ensure the future is in safe hands too.

Sam, 23, of Green Lane Farm, Yarlet, was chosen by Farmers Weekly as its young Farmer of the Year.

Sam is milking 140 cows, as well as tending a flock of 250 sheep, and is the youngest tenant on Staffordshire County Council's County Farms estate. So huge congratulations to him.

- **Isabel Trail**

Last week we learned of a tragic accident on the Isabel Trail in Stafford in which family man Neville Scattergood died.

While investigations are continuing and the trail remains closed this week, all our thoughts are with Mr Scattergood's wife and family after this terrible accident.

Integrated Performance Report Outturn 2018/19 and Quarter 1, 2019/20 (Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins referred to the underspend in 2018/19 and enquired as to whether it could have been utilised to reprove the proposed cut in residential provision within the County's Special Schools. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that the County Council was facing increasing financial pressures and needed to make savings of £62m over the next five years and that the prudent thing to do is to put any underspend into general

balances to be available to support the challenging Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in 2019/20 and beyond.

Burton upon Trent Regeneration Strategy

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Mr P White, Mr Peters and Mrs Jessel referred to the excellent relationship which existed between the Borough Council and the County Council which had resulted in the preparation of the Burton upon Trent Regeneration Strategy and the benefits it would bring to the area.

Mrs Woodward expressed the hope that similar discussions could take place with the leadership of Lichfield District Council, particularly in respect of the regeneration of Burntwood which was in need of capital investment. Mr Dudson expressed similar comments in respect of Cannock Chase District and the need for regeneration within Rugeley. In response, Mr Deaville indicated that the Council was working in partnership with all the District and Borough Councils within Staffordshire.

Staffordshire Response to the Local Area Review – Written Statement of Action

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Mrs Wilson commended the work of the SEND team, teachers and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People who were working tirelessly to achieve positive outcomes for those with special educational needs and disabilities. Mr Spencer added that he echoed the views expressed by Mrs Wilson and added that teachers often had to deal with challenging behaviour.

Mrs Woodward indicated that it was often quite difficult for parents of young people with SEND to navigate “through the system”, particularly with regard to getting Education, Health and Care Plans in place. She also added that there were massive costs to schools in supporting pupils with SEND.

Mr Sutton extended his thanks to those Members who had taken the time to attend their local SEND Hub meetings. He also stressed the value of early intervention when dealing with children and young people with SEND.

Mr Sutton also spoke about the residential provision within five of the 23 Special Schools in the County and indicated that the current contract was due to expire in July 2020. He added that, in Staffordshire, no child with a Education Health and Care Plan required overnight provision to meet their needs and that such provision was not statutory and was not provided by the majority of other local authorities. Decisions around future provision would need to be taken on the basis of a whole system approach and no decisions on the future of the service would be taken until the Council had been able to complete that work.

HS2 Phase 2a Qualifying Authority Process

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Mr Robinson referred to the impact becoming a Qualifying Authority could have on the work of the Council’s planning officers and sought an assurance that the team was

adequately resourced to deal with this extra work. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that the County Council had put aside sufficient resources to deal with the implications of being a qualifying authority.

Mr C Greatorex and Mr Northcott indicated that they supported the proposal that the County Council becomes a Qualifying Authority as this would give the Council additional powers such as over construction traffic routing and thus mitigating the impact of the construction works on local communities. Mr Northcott also indicated that it will be a difficult task to keep Members informed of decisions taken by the Planning Authority when determining planning matters in respect of HS2 as the timescale for taking such decisions was quite short.

Mrs Eagland expressed the hope that the Government would take the decision to abandon HS2. She also stressed the need for HS2 to keep local members informed when taking decisions on matters which affected their divisions.

Adoption of Revised Statement of Community Involvement (Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward expressed concern that, despite their being local opposition to a planning application submitted to a district/borough council, the County Council, as the highway authority, often did not object to the application and that the local member was often not made aware of this until the matter came before the planning committee for determination. She expressed the view that there needed to be a mechanism whereby the local member was informed of the comments submitted by the County Council officers on behalf of the Highway Authority at the point they were submitted to the local planning authority. Mr Davis indicated that he also shared Mrs Woodward's concerns. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that the County Council had written to the district/borough councils several times requesting them to change their processes in order to address this issue. Mrs Jessel added that the local planning authorities normally published this information on their respective planning portal's but the local member would then need to trawl through all the current applications to find the one they were interested in. She suggested that a way to resolve the issue would be for County officers to submit a copy of the Form X (the Council's comments as Highways Authority) to the local member at the same time as submitting it to the relevant local planning authority.

Adult Learning Disability 2022 Community Offer: The Future of Learning Disability Services directly provided by Staffordshire County Council (Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mrs Atkins concerning the development of better quality respite services for persons with learning disabilities, Mr A White indicated that there had been engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including service users and their carers and that a report on this matter was to be taken to Cabinet in November.

Shared Lives Contract Recommission

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

In response to questions from Mrs Atkins and Mrs Woodward in relation to the Shared Lives contract and how performance of the service provider was measured, Mr A White indicated that the current contract was due to end in March 2020 and that the Council was looking to re-commission the contract whilst ensuring best value for taxpayers. He added that the Council had a team of commissioners who ensured that contracts delivered value for money and met the performance standards required of them.

South Staffordshire Growth Agreement

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward and Mrs Wilson spoke about the success of “town deals” and how they could become the building blocks for “district based agreements”. In response, Mr Atkins referred to the South Staffordshire Growth agreement and cited it as good example of partnership working to grow the local economy.

Government Spending Review

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mrs Atkins in relation to the Council’s proposed “Green Paper” on health and care in Staffordshire, Mr A White indicated that the Council’s own “Green Paper” had been drafted and would be forwarded to Scrutiny for their views in due course.

Mr Robinson and Mr Hewitt referred to the Government’s announcement of additional funding for bus services and enquired as to what was being done to ensure that the County Council received its fair share of that funding.

Mr P White referred to the recent good news on the fairer funding of schools and the Government’s guarantee of a minimum of £5,000 per pupil for secondary schools and £4,000 for primary schools. He, together with Mrs Eagland, also welcomed the announcement of additional funding to support Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Mr Atkins reminded Members that the additional funding announced in this year’s Spending Round was for one year only and that a longer term solution was needed on the funding of social care.

Growing Staffordshire’s Economy

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Mr Brookes, Mr Smith, Mr Winnington, Mr P White and Mr Atkins paid tribute to David Frost the former Chairman of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership for the contribution he had made to the work of the Partnership.

Mr Robinson referred to the issue of “growth equality” and indicated that around 84,000 workers (28.1%) in Staffordshire earned below the “living wage”. He enquired as to

what could be done to lift more people out of poverty and encourage better pay for Staffordshire's low earners.

Mrs Woodward referred to the number of jobs which had recently been lost in the County and indicated that it would be helpful to see some net figures showing job losses against gains (jobs created) and for this information to be made available to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that there would always be "churn" in the local economy and the Council was working in partnership with other stakeholders to provide opportunities for businesses to grow.

Mr Parry indicated that the Council was successful in attracting businesses into Staffordshire, particularly those offering better paid jobs and it was important to ensure that the workforce was equipped with the necessary skills to allow them to compete for those jobs. Mr P White added that Staffordshire was fortunate in having one of the lowest unemployment rates in the Country. He also spoke about the role of colleges and universities in providing opportunities for up-skilling the workforce.

Mr Lawson and Mr Atkins welcomed the recent announcement that Hays Travel were to take over the travel agency shops previously run by Thomas Cook.

Staffordshire's Countryside

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Several Members indicated that they welcomed the recent announcements that the RSPB had agreed a 100-year lease for the charity to take over the management and day-to-day running of the local authority-owned Consall Nature Park and that Heath Hayes and Wimblebury Parish Council were to take on the management and maintenance of Wimblebury Mound picnic area to the north west of Chasewater. Mr Hewitt added that he would encourage other local groups to take on responsibility for the local management of land within the Countryside Estate. Mr Worthington added that he hoped that the RSPB could continue to allow the Parish Council to have use of the meeting facilities at Consall Nature Park.

Mrs Woodward also indicated that she welcomed the news and suggested that it would be useful for Members to have an update on what was happening with the regards to the future management of the remainder of the Council's countryside estate including Chasewater and Cannock Chase.

Mr Brookes stated that he hoped that the management agreements with third parties for land comprising the Countryside Estate included provisions to enable them to carry out any necessary pest control measures in order to ensure biodiversity.

Mr Ward stressed the important role played by the Countryside estate in protecting the County's heritage and in supporting the education curriculum.

Mrs Heath thanked Members for their comments and stated that, from the commencement of the review, the Council had made a commitment not to sell-off any part of its Countryside Estate. She added that officers were still working on the arrangements for the future management of other areas within the Estate.

Potholes

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

Mr Smith indicated that there had been a considerable reduction in the number of potholes awaiting repair in the County which, at the beginning of 2017, stood at around 12,000 and now stood at around 7,000. He commended the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, together with the relevant officers, for their work. Mrs Woodward indicated that potholes still remained a major concern for residents and she questioned as to from where Mr Smith had obtained his data. In response, Mr Deaville confirmed that good progress was being made on tackling the backlog of highway repairs due, in part, to the additional investment being made by the County Council to support this work. He confirmed that the data provided by Mr Smith was correct and that of the approximately 7,000 repairs still awaited, the majority, 5,300, related to Category 3 (the lowest level) defects. He also indicated that 96% of repairs were carried out “right first time”.

Mr Dudson referred to the difficulties he had encountered in trying to get repairs to a traffic island in his Division and the surface of Horsefair in Rugeley. Mr Clarke indicated that he had experienced similar delays and that an issue he had reported in Goodman Street, Burton upon Trent in 2016 had only recently been addressed.

Mr B Jones informed Members of recent developments in the Council’s “Digital Offer” which now enable residents to report a wider range of highway issues via a smartphone or tablet. As a result of these developments, the Council’s Contact Centre had seen a reduction in calls to them and could achieve savings of £300,000.

Mr Worthington indicated that he had used his Divisional Highway Programme Local Communities Priorities funding allocation to expedite minor highway repairs within his area.

Winter Operations

(Paragraph 16 of the Statement)

Mr Brookes paid tribute to local farmers, parish councils and other volunteers who assisted the Council in keeping roads and footways open during the winter months.

Mr Lawson referred to issues around getting grit bins refilled and also ensuring that they were available in the right locations taking account of new housing developments etc. In response, Mrs Woodward referred to the reduction in funding for grit bins in the Council’s MTFS.

A521 Programme to Support New Homes by St Modwen

Mr Flunder extended his thanks to the Council for listening to the concerns of local residents and working with the developer to lessen the impact of the construction works on the A521 in Blythe Bridge which are required to support a new housing development. Mr Deaville added that he too welcomed the revised proposals which would see the A521 partially open rather than being closed for ten weeks.

National award for Sam Bailey

Mr Brookes, Mrs Trowbridge and Mrs Heath extended their congratulations to Sam Bailey, who was the tenant of a County Council Holding at Yarlet, for his achievement in being chosen by Farmers Weekly as its “Young Farmer of the Year”.

Isabel Trail

The Council extended their deepest sympathy to the family of Neville Scattergood who died recently as a result of a tragic accident on the Isabel Trail in Stafford.

RESOLVED – That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received.

29. Notices of Motion

Mrs Atkins moved, and Mrs Woodward seconded, the following motion:

“In the interests of the environment, safety, better air quality and increased school choice, this Council supports the reform of the school transport system including the introduction of dedicated buses. This Council will urge the Government to facilitate the necessary legislative changes.”

In moving consideration of her motion, Mrs Atkins highlighted a number of issues including the following:

- The current school transport system had largely been unchanged over the last 20 years.
- 20% of traffic congestion was due to the “school run”.
- The “school run” adds an extra 2m tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere per year.
- The current Home to School Policy does not address the issue of child safety, particularly in rural/unlit areas.
- The Home to School Policy can negatively impact parental choice, particularly for low income families.

Mr P White indicated that he could not support the motion for the following reasons:

- The introduction of dedicated buses would be expensive and create dependency on the state.
- The dedicated buses would stand idle for the majority of the day.
- Currently, 95% of pupils make their own arrangements to get to school.
- The proposals would undermine the commercial bus network.
- He did not agree that the proposals for would lead to an improvement in air quality.
- The proposals would not lead to improvements in health, for example fewer children may choose to walk to school.

Mr P White also indicated that the County Council was taking part in the Department for Education consultation.

Mr C Greatorex indicated that he too shared the concerns raised by Mr P White. Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED – That the Motion be not carried.

30. Appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees

Mr Atkins moved, and Mr White seconded, the following changes to the Chairmanship/Vice-Chairmanship of Committees:

Corporate Review Committee

Chairman	David Williams
Vice-Chairman	David Brookes

RESOLVED – That Mr D Williams be appointed as Chairman of the Corporate Review Committee and that Mr Brookes be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

31. Outcomes of Overview and Scrutiny Work January - June 2019

Mrs Woodward, Mr Atkins, Mr Brookes and Mr Tagg paid tribute to the Scrutiny staff in the Council's Member and Democratic Services Team and, in particular, Mrs Tina Gould, who had recently retired from the Authority. Mrs Woodward also welcomed Mrs Mandy Pattinson into her new role within the team.

Mr A White stated that he welcomed the challenge to the Executive that the Council's scrutiny function provided as it was through scrutiny and challenge that the Council made better decisions.

Mr Tagg referred to the Car Parking Strategy and requested that an update be provided by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport in due course.

Mr Atkins also paid tribute to the members of the All Party Working Groups for the work they had undertaken.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

32. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Mr Hussain highlighted the issue of knife crime, which had seen a 4.7% increase in the County, and enquired as to whether it would not be advantageous to implement the successful programme operated in Glasgow which had resulted in such crimes reducing by 62%. He asked that this matter be raised with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Mr Spencer commended the work of "Catch 22", a social, not for profit business, delivering support for victims of CSE and children who went missing.

Mrs Beech reported that, in July, her local Parish Council were informed that there would be no Police assistance for the Remembrance Day parade and that the police would only be there to lay a wreath. She added that, thankfully Audley Parish Council had stepped in and applied for two road closures for two different services around the Parish and Audley Bowmen had offered to provide the marshalling. Although the marshalling was to be provided at no cost, the road closures costed £1800 which the Parish Council could ill afford. Mrs Beech requested further clarification on this change in Police policy including who gave the instruction, was it a one-off or would be applied to all remembrance services. She also enquired as to when the new Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner was elected, would the Panel be requesting him/her to review the policy

Mr Robinson referred to the final page of the Report and indicated that there was an error in that the reference to “the closure of Kidsgrove Police Station” should read “the closure of the public Police Desk located in Kidsgrove Town Hall.”

Mrs Woodward referred to Police establishment numbers and the Commissioner’s intention to recruit an additional 69 officers between 2018/19 and 2019/20. She indicated that in an announcement on 9 October, it was reported that an additional 90 officers were to be recruited in Staffordshire. Mrs Woodward enquired as to whether these additional 90 officers included the 69 previously announced or were in addition to them, making a total of 159.

Mr Sweeney thanked Members for their questions and undertook to forward them to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for a response. He also undertook to circulate the Commissioner’s responses to all Members.

Mrs Edgeller reminded Members of the opportunity to submit questions in writing to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner at meetings of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

33. Questions

Mrs Woodward asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

All County Councillors and Unison members across Staffordshire will be aware of the recent emails from the Regional Secretary of Unison alleging serious financial mismanagement within the County Council. The Leader will also be aware of discussions that I have had over many months with the Chief Executive and senior officers to address concerns raised by Unison, along with my Deputy Group Leader and others. Will he now undertake to respond in detail to the serious questions raised in the emails that Members have received?

Reply

We firmly refute these allegations which are misleading or simply untrue.

The Unison claims refer to historical matters which have already been investigated and, where appropriate, action was taken. Some failings in procurement practice between 2012 and 2016 were identified, and procurement practices have been changed as a result. An independent investigation found there was absolutely no fraudulent activity or personal gain by employees because of this.

Staffordshire County Council remains willing to work with all of our trade unions in a constructive and respectful way. We would hope that trade unions would share that approach and seek to represent the best interests of their fee-paying members.

We will be responding to Unison in due course. If any member wants any further information they have only to ask, as has always been the case. After all, it is the elected members that run this Council, not Unison, which is why it was dealt with by a cross party committee.

Supplementary Question

I hope that every Member across this Chamber will take seriously the information we have been sent by Unison. I, my deputy and members of my group have met with the Chief Executive and Directors to talk through some of the issues and we've also met with senior officers of Unison. Some questions remain and we will continue to pursue those and hope that Mr Atkins and his group will deal with these matters in a fair, open and transparent way. May I ask for his reassurance on that please?

Reply

Yes, you can rest assured that we are always fair, open and transparent.

Mrs Woodward asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Commercial whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Can the Cabinet Member please tell me what have been the costs of securing the Greenwood House site in Burntwood from 2009 to the present?

Reply

Whilst the site has remained unused since 2009, the site itself was not secured in any way until 2014/15 when small scale vandalism began to happen. Since then through to the end of March 2019 a total of £42,881 has been spent securing the site. This excludes the costs of removing the recent travellers and cleaning up the site after they vacated.

Mrs Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

What student discount travel schemes now operate within Staffordshire? Which companies operate them and which routes are covered? How do the discounts compare to the discontinued Your Staffordshire Card Scheme? Are there any districts / boroughs within Staffordshire where no concessionary travel schemes operate for young people?

Reply

There are 18 bus companies that operate in Staffordshire and they all operate their own commercial fare structures. In general, they all offer discounts for regular bus users of all age groups.

85% of Staffordshire bus journeys are taken on bus routes operated by Arriva, First, Midland Classic, or D&G buses. Each one of these companies have their own student discount schemes for regular users.

As members will recall the Your Staffordshire Card scheme was brought in to encourage bus companies to bring their own schemes forward and to encourage young people to use public transport. It was ended as pass holder numbers and YSC bus trips had been in a terminal decline for several years. The available evidence suggested that this was due to young people voting with their feet and switching to alternative, better value, commercial products offered by the bus companies that were right for them in their area.

I am not aware of any areas of Staffordshire where buses are operated which don't have some form of commercial discount fare structure for regular bus users.

Supplementary Question

I find this response a little bit complacent because, at the time the Your Staffordshire Card was withdrawn, 10,850 people were using it. I had hoped for a more detailed response because when the card was withdrawn, we did specifically ask about other discount schemes and we have never been given a breakdown of where those discount schemes are. I would hope that the Cabinet Member would be able to provide that?

Reply (by Mr Deaville on behalf of Mrs Fisher)

I will pass on your question to the Cabinet Member and ask her for further comment on this matter.

Mr Robinson asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Residents of the Red Street community have raised concerns about Crackley Bank and surrounding roads being designated by the council as diversionary routes for heavy traffic whilst works take place on the busy A34. Staffordshire County Council is too quick to allow this route to be used as a diversion to the detriment of local people. In future, will the County Council do all it can to seek other routes to mitigate the strain put on the residents of Red Street?

Reply

Since July, the highway team has been delivering a major scheme on the A34 Talke Road, Newcastle involving the replacement of drainage, kerbing and resurfacing of the carriageway.

Lane closures have been in place on the A34 for the duration of the scheme with night time closures from September through to mid-October, week nights only, Monday to Friday.

Where diversion routes are required during road closures, the network management team seek to ensure wherever possible that the preferred and hence signed diversion routes are a road of the same classification. In this case the signed diversion route for closures on the A34 is via the A500.

Work in the vicinity of Parkhouse roundabout has also required the closure of the unclassified road known as Parkhouse Road West for which the diversion route identified and signed was a higher-class road, the C363 Crackley Bank.

The increasing use of sat nav can mean that motorists may follow routes other than the signed diversion route and similarly, highway users that are familiar with the area may choose to use other local routes despite the signing put in place.

The network management team will continue to seek to minimise the impact of road closures on local communities firstly by keeping the number of such occasions to a minimum and secondly by routing diverted traffic to roads of a similar nature.

Supplementary Question

I do have to insist that some of the roads through Red Street are not designed to take some of the heavy goods vehicles that pass along them because of these diversions. Can the Cabinet Member ensure that the County Council will try and look at other routes where possible to create diversions rather than going through Red Street; and also make sure that local members are properly notified and consulted?

Reply (by Mr Deaville on behalf of Mrs Fisher)

I will discuss this matter with Mrs Fisher on her return from leave.

Mr Robinson asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Can the Leader of the Council please provide an update about what Staffordshire County Council is doing to improve and promote integrated transport in Staffordshire?

Reply

As the Member may be aware, improving and promoting integrated transport in Staffordshire starts with strategic planning and for many years the authority has developed and promoted eight integrated transport strategies to align with our eight local planning authority partners.

The strategies cover all modes of transport and are reviewed regularly to consider major planning consultations and any changes in transport issues and priorities.

The authority is actively involved in Midlands Connect which seeks to influence forward investment programmes of Highways England and Network Rail making sure that Staffordshire's voice is heard and the right infrastructure is built for our economy.

We are also engaged in West Midlands Rail which aims to improve local rail services in the area building on the success of over 54% rail passenger growth in Staffordshire in the last 10 years.

Walking and Cycling is encouraged at an early age in Staffordshire via the promotion of walking buses and cycling training via our Bikeability programme. We are now in the final stages of developing our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which has been undertaken using monies gained from a successful DfT bid.

Good relations with our public bus operators are maintained and improvements to on-street real time public transport information and other bus priority infrastructure have been implemented to encourage modal shift and support the commercial bus network.

Supplementary Question

Does the Leader agree with me that connectivity of our communities is absolutely vital especially when we are discussing the growth of the local economy? Increasingly concerns are being raised with me by residents that connectivity and public transport is having a detrimental impact on people's work and social life; and that people feel cut-off and isolated due to the lack of local bus services. Does the Leader agree with me that it is time for Staffordshire to be a bit more bold on transport and to start looking at the benefits of setting up a municipal bus service for Staffordshire?

Reply

Yes to the first question and no to the second.

Mr Smith asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

At the July Council meeting I asked the following question.

“Twelve months ago, on the 11th July 2018, together with a County Officer, I had a meeting with Mr Francis Thomas, Head of Corporate Affairs at West Midlands Railway.

At the meeting Mr Thomas gave an absolute assurance that they would not introduce charging at Shenstone Station until they had completed a full public consultation which would include highway proposals for on street parking and a study into the point of origin of vehicles before introducing parking charges.

My understanding is that there was an understanding that WMT were intent on introducing charging for parking at Shenstone (and Penkridge) and they would work with the County Council so any displacement of vehicles onto the surrounding highway was managed properly.

Can you advise what progress has been made with WMR to see, now they have introduced charging without consultation, what we can do to help ease the situation?”

West Midland Rail have now implemented the charges for parking and, as anticipated, the car park at Shenstone Station is now running at half capacity and the car parking in Shenstone has seriously worsened. What action can the Council take to address this problem? We already have a plan to better control parking but this will not be operational before the year end?

Reply

As Chair of West Midlands Rail Executive, I am extremely disappointed that parking charges have now been introduced in an uncoordinated manner without the necessary parking restrictions on the adjacent roads. This is despite assurances from West Midlands Trains that they would work with the County Council prior to the introduction of parking charges to look at how the displacement of vehicles onto the local highway network could be managed – some of which the County Council has offered to finance.

My officers are aware of the impact that these charges are having on local residents living in the vicinity of Shenstone Rail Station and they have raised these issues with West Midlands Trains. I can assure you that they will continue to liaise and work with West Midlands Trains to try and agree solutions that are acceptable to both parties and that will minimise the impact of vehicle displacement on the local highway network.

West Midlands Trains has worked with the County Council to reduce the level of parking charges that have now been introduced at Shenstone Rail Station.

I will continue to press the matter and would like to thank Local Members for raising awareness of the issue.

Supplementary Question

May I ask the Cabinet Member, as Chairman of the West Midlands Rail Executive, what influence does he have over West Midlands Rail; and whatever the outcome of your discussions with them in relation to parking at Shenstone Railway Station, can he ensure that local members are kept informed in order that they can pass on the information to the Parish Council and local residents?

Reply

The West Midlands Rail Executive have the power to direct/ask/cajole the train operator to do what they promised in their Franchise. We will keep you informed of any further developments arising from our ongoing dialogue with them in respect of parking at Shenstone Railway Station.

Mrs Edgeller asked the following question of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

As Mental Health Champion, I have spoken with various people involved in Mental Health and discover there is still no set 'pathway' for people's progressive needs in order for them to progress to better health. What is the County Council doing, working with the CCGs and MPTF, to resolve this issue?

Reply

The Council continues to work with the NHS, including the CCG and MPFT, to implement the Mental Health Strategy "Mental Health is Everybody's Business".

The Council continues to support people to look after mental well-being in the same way as physical health. This includes an awareness raising campaign, training to help people build resilience, and targeted suicide prevention activities for higher risk groups.

There is no single assessment and care pathway: every person is different and has different needs. Some people with mental health conditions require intensive interventions short term to enable them to recover; others may require ongoing therapy and support over a longer period.

The Council works with CCGs and MPFT to ensure that people have an integrated health and social care assessment and support plan. This is illustrated by:

- The recent Cabinet decision to extend the integrated working arrangements with MPFT, which includes Mental Health social care, for a further 3 years;
- The appointment of an Assistant Director for Adult Social Care and Safeguarding / Director of Adult Social care jointly with MPFT;
- The use of the Care Programme Approach to jointly assess people's health and social care needs and develop appropriate integrated support plans focusing on recovery and well-being outcomes;

- Commissioning of joint mental health services on behalf of the CCGs, jointly with social care services;
- New commissioning arrangements for Supported Living for people with mental health conditions who require support longer term, which will offer the least restrictive care to help people maintain their independence.

We always appreciate feedback and I would be very happy to meet with Cllr Edgeller to explore what further specific changes we could make to improve people's experience.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for your comprehensive answer and I look forward to working with you and MPFT on how we can improve our services going forward?

Reply

Thank you for all the work you do as mental health champion in raising the profile of mental health.

Mrs Edgeller asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Whenever there is disruption on the M6 Junctions 12-15, traffic is diverted through Stafford and it becomes gridlocked.

This is becoming more frequent and together with heavier volumes of traffic, in addition to scheduled road works, is making local journeys difficult if not impossible.

With so much housing development taking place or planned in Stafford, will the County Council use its powers and influence on others to look into this problem, and also with a view to help resolve the situation whenever there is a Planning Application in the south of the town?

Reply

The network management unit (NMU) work closely with Highways England to manage traffic in the event of a major incident that requires closure of the M6 through Staffordshire.

In the case of protracted closures or restrictions on the motorway, the authority requires the deployment of a national, rather than emergency, diversion route, and variable messaging on the strategic network advises of the closure from Dover to Carlisle, to allow motorists to make alternative route choices. We have seen the implementation of this strategic diversion significantly reduce the volume of traffic that makes it to the point of closure, and subsequently divert onto the Staffordshire network.

In addition to the above, any works or developments on the route through Staffordshire are advised they are working on an agreed emergency diversion route for the M6 before works commence, and in the case of an incident will be required to remove or reduce traffic management as appropriate, or ensure that signals are manually controlled to assist in maintaining traffic flows.

When disruption or congestion occurs on the M6, rather than an incident, many drivers will refer to sat navs to find quicker alternative routes and reduce journey time. In this case traffic is not being purposely diverted onto the Staffordshire network by Highways England, rather drivers are making a free choice on their chosen route.

Supplementary Question

I feel that you have not fully answered my question regarding the south end of Stafford and may I ask you to get the Highways Department to look at this situation as we have not yet seen the impact of developments at the St Leonard's site, the Tixall Road site and the former Police Headquarters at Baswich?

Reply

We will do what we can but we need more developments in order to pay for more infrastructure.

Mr Brookes asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Would the Cabinet Member please outline the performance of the pot hole repairs within the County over the past three years?

Reply

In 2017 Cabinet agreed a 4-year x £5m/year highway maintenance extra investment strategy to help tackle what was a growing number of potholes across the County. As well as an increase in pothole repair activity the strategy includes ongoing investment in preventative maintenance treatments and targeted drainage improvements.

During 2019/20 the strategy is providing:

- £2m to enable an extra 9,000 pothole repairs;
- £2m to provide around 40 miles of additional low-cost pothole prevention surface treatments; and
- £1m towards additional drainage repairs, targeted at locations where poor drainage is leading to premature road surface deterioration.

As we now approach the end of the main road-repair season, in the 3rd year of this 4-year programme, I am pleased to report that the programme is proving to be a big success: At the start of 2017 there were around 12,000 identified or reported pothole

defects on Staffordshire's local road network; and today that number has been reduced to around 6,500. That is a reduction of around 45% in less than 3-years.

However, it is important to be clear that the number of potholes that repeatedly occur on our roads is a direct symptom of the level of capital 'life-adding' investment made each year through central government capital-maintenance grant. Staffordshire's Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIMAP), identifies that the level of funding currently provided each year is only around half of what is currently needed. We are continuing to make our case to government and hope that some of the money recently announced for road infrastructure will find its way to local road maintenance.

Mrs Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

The Cabinet Member and Leader know of the ongoing campaign by Perton Action for Safe School Travel (PASST) to ensure that appropriate transport options are in place for students going to and from local schools. Will the Cabinet Member and Leader meet with members of the group to discuss their concerns and help to find solutions to the current impasse?

Reply

The authority is aware of the ongoing campaign of Perton Action for Safe School Travel (PASST). Their concerns were considered carefully by the county council during, and following, the conclusion of the stage 2 travel assistance appeal in December 2018.

The appeal concluded that the county council's school travel policy and the law had been applied correctly, that there were no exceptional reasons why Perton should receive preferential treatment compared to other communities across Staffordshire and, therefore, that pupils who live below the statutory 3-mile walking limit were not entitled to free travel assistance.

Affected parents were advised that the county council's two-stage review and appeal process had been exhausted and that the decision was final. Parents were advised of their right to complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and following a complaint, the LGSCO advised the authority, in September 2019, of their intention to investigate.

Given that the Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council support the appeal decision and that an LGSCO investigation is ongoing it would not be appropriate for us to meet with the action group until that independent process has reached a conclusion.

Supplementary Question

Does the Cabinet Member know what the local community, parish council and local members are doing to try to cover this gap?

Reply

The rules around walking routes are quite clear. This route has been assessed three times and has been deemed to be a safe walking route. I am aware that there is a campaign group who are not happy about that but that is the situation. We are aware that they have made a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman and we are quite happy to engage with the Ombudsman if he finds that we have done something wrong.

34. Petitions

(a) Petition in support of the proposed “Area of Reflection” being incorporated adjacent to the Town’s War Memorial in Market Square, Uttoxeter

Mr Atkins Presented a petition, (on behalf of Mr Brookes), from Uttoxeter Town Council and the residents of Uttoxeter, in support of the proposed “Area of Reflection” being incorporated adjacent to the Town’s War Memorial in Market Square.

(b) Request for the Installation of Limited waiting lines around Shenstone Station

Mr Smith presented a petition from residents of Admiral Park Drive, Richard Cooper Road, New Road, Station Road and Holm View Close, Shenstone requesting the installation of limited waiting lines around Shenstone Station.

Chairman