

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 18 March 2021

Present:

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

Apologies for absence: Alan Dudson, Ian Parry and Conor Wileman

PART ONE

39. 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
Mark Deaville	43	Personal	Director of Nexus
Keith Flunder	43	Personal	In receipt of a small grant from Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Dave Jones	43	Personal	Daughter is a SEND pupil in a Staffordshire School
Dave Jones	43	Personal	Employee of Keele University
Mark Winnington	43	Personal	Non-Executive Director of Nexus
Mark Winnington	43	Personal	Grower of Energy Crops

40. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 11 February 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 11 February 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

41. Chairman's Correspondence

Former County Councillor Veronica Downes

The Council were informed of the death, on 21 February 2021, of former County Councillor Veronica Downes. Mrs Downes represented the Penkridge (South Staffordshire) County Electoral Division on the County Council between 2005 and 2013. She served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny and Performance Panel; Pensions Committee; as Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel; Healthier Communities and Older people Scrutiny and Performance Panel; as Vice-Chairman of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee; Audit Committee; Standards Committee; Enterprise, Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee; Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee; Safeguarding and Public Protection Committee; and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Mrs Downes also served as the Shadow Cabinet Member for Adult Care and Wellbeing, and as the Cabinet Member for Schools.

Cllr Philip Atkins, Cllr Edgeller, Cllr Sutton, Cllr David Williams and Cllr Winnington paid tribute to Cllr Downes following which Members stood and observed a one minute silence to her memory.

Covid-19

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended her thanks to Staffordshire residents and businesses for the sacrifices they had made during the pandemic. She also thanked Council staff and partners for their extraordinary efforts over the last year, the NHS staff and volunteers for the vital role they were playing in vaccinating Staffordshire residents; and to teachers and school staff who had worked tirelessly to enable pupils to return to face to face learning.

The Chairman added that it was still as important as ever that people continued to follow government guidance to control the spread of the virus: with the prospect of restrictions being eased, no-one wanted to see a return to another lockdown.

42. Retiring Members

The Chairman reported that the following Members had indicated their intention not to seek re-election at the County Council elections in May 2021 and would thus be retiring from the Authority:

- Ben Adams – Elected 2009 – Perrycrofts (Tamworth)

- Ron Clarke – Elected 2011 – Burton Town (East Staffordshire)
- Maureen Compton – Elected 2005 – 2009 and re-elected 2013 – Stafford Central (Stafford)
- John Cooper – Elected 2017 – Bradwell, Porthill and Wolstanton (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
- Derek Davis – Elected 1985 – Chadsmoor (Cannock Chase)
- Helen Fisher – Elected 2017 – Burntwood South (Lichfield)
- Keith James – Elected 2013 – Perton (South Staffordshire)
- Trevor Johnson – Elected 2017 – May Bank and Cross Heath (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
- Bryan Jones – Elected 2017 – Hednesford and Rawnsley (Cannock Chase)
- Alastair Little – Elected 2017 – Amington (Tamworth)
- Natasha Pullen – Elected 2017 – Lichfield City North (Lichfield)
- Kyle Robinson – Elected 2017 – Talk and Red Street (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
- Martyn Tittley – Elected 2013 – Lichfield Rural West (Lichfield)

The Chairman, together with the political group leaders and several other Members, thanked their fellow Members, and in particular Cllr Derek Davis, for the contribution they had made to the work of the Authority during their time in office.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

43. 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.

Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board (Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Cllr Peters and Cllr Snape paid tribute to the hard work of the County Council and the NHS in tackling the Covid pandemic in their respective areas and for the roll-out of the vaccination programme. Cllr Snape did however express concern about the impact of the pandemic on access to GP services with many residents being unable to get face-to-face consultations with their GP. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that this was a complex issue and that, due to the pandemic, GP surgery waiting rooms were not the place for vulnerable people to be. He added that the “productivity” of surgeries had fallen as a consequence of them needing to be Covid secure.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins and Cllr Woodward expressed their concerns about the poor performance of the national Test and Trace system and indicated that it provided poor value for money and that contact tracing could be more effectively carried out by local public health teams.

Cllr Winnington praised the work of Nexus Cares in supporting lateral flow testing across the County. He also paid tribute to the NHS in respect of the roll-out of the vaccination programme in Staffordshire.

Cllr Flunder enquired as to what more could be done to support care homes and, in particular, to work towards relatives of residents being given increased access to visit their loved ones.

In response to issues raised by Members, Cllr McMahon indicated that infection rates across Staffordshire were falling and that vaccination rates in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with over 500,000 people being vaccinated to date, were higher than in any other parts of the Country. He also added that he was heartened by the fall in hospital admissions due to Covid. With regard to Test and Trace, Cllr McMahon stated that he agreed with Cllrs Charlotte Atkins and Woodward that this could be undertaken more effectively locally and that the Leader of the Council had written to the Government to ask for more local autonomy in responding to the pandemic.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business: Investing in our Economy

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Cllr Winnington spoke about the work of the Council's Destination Management Partnership and the opportunities to relaunch the tourism and hospitality sectors in the County as many people would be taking "staycations".

Cllr Deaville and Cllr Pert added that they supported the investment in the Destination Management Partnership and the many initiatives that the Council had introduced to support the Staffordshire economy.

Cllr Philip White thanked Members for their comments and added that unemployment rates in the County remained low. He also referred to the creation of new jobs including at JCB and on the i54 site in South Staffordshire. He added that the proposed creation of a freeport at East Midlands airport would also have a beneficial impact on A38/A50 corridor in Staffordshire.

Climate Change Strategic Development Framework

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Cllr Brookes, Cllr Philip Atkins and Cllr Winnington referred to the valuable contribution the agricultural sector made to the UK economy, what farmers were doing to tackle climate change, and the plans for the sector to become carbon neutral. Cllr Philip Atkins also spoke about the need for reforms to the planning system to enable farmers to diversify more easily.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to which key stakeholders the Council had been working with in respect of its climate agenda and whether this included Keele University. In response, Cllr Jessel confirmed that she had recently met with representatives from Keele University to discuss how the University, the County Council and other partners could continue to work together to drive forward the climate change agenda.

Cllr Flunder expressed his thanks to Cllr Jessel for attending the recent Parish Council Assembly in the Staffordshire Moorlands at which she spoke about what the County Council was doing, in partnership with others, to tackle climate change.

Cllr Woodward spoke about the role of Members in being local champions to promote “act local – think global”. She also referred to the pledges Members had been asked to make as to how they, individually, would help to address the issue of climate change. In response, Cllr Jessel indicated that it was proposed as part of the annual report on what had been achieved in respect of the climate change agenda, Members would be invited to indicate what action they had taken in respect of the pledges they had made.

Cllr Woodward also enquired as to the take up of the grant funding made available to local communities by the County Council for climate change related initiatives. In response, Cllr Jessel indicated that the initiative had been well received, that take-up of the grant funding had been high, and that it had helped raise awareness of the need for change.

Implementation of the Updated Staffordshire County Council Education Infrastructure Contributions Policy (SEICP)

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Cllr Robinson in relation to developers paying their fair share towards the provision of new schools or additional school places, Cllr Price indicated that the new SEICP follows government guidance issued in 2019 and permits the County Council to obtain larger S106 contributions from developers than previously. Cllr Price also referred to the Schools Capital programme for 2021/22 which had recently been agreed by the Cabinet and provided for the construction of a number of new schools.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021-26

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Several Members expressed their support for the strategy and praised the SEND provision across the County. Cllr Price thanked Members for their comments and outlined how the strategy had been developed and the consultation which had taken place with stakeholders.

Staffordshire History Centre: National Lottery Heritage Fund – Round Two Submission

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Cllr Price, Cllr Trowbridge, and Cllr Francis expressed their support for the project and commented on the benefits the investment would bring to Stafford and to the County as a whole.

Digital First - Update and Plan for the Digital Principle

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Cllr Robinson and Cllr Charlotte Atkins spoke about the potential impact of “Digital First” on those who did not have access to a computer or smart device or struggled with IT or to get on-line. Cllr Atkins also indicated that it was important that the proposals did not disenfranchise those residents who did not have access to IT. In response, Cllr Bryan Jones referred to the training and support which was available to residents via the Library Service.

Cllr Robinson also expressed the view that improvements needed to be made to the MyStaffs App to make it easier to use. Cllr Brookes added that although the App was useful for reporting highways defects such as potholes, it did not inform the person who submitted the report of the outcome.

Cllr Bryan Jones and Cllr Sutherland referred to the vital role that “digital” had played during the Covid pandemic; how it was improving access to services; how it was saving the County Council money and how it aimed to improve the customer experience. They acknowledge however that use of the technology did have its pitfalls and that these needed to be addressed.

Integrated Performance Report 2020-21 – Quarter 3 (Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Cllr Robinson enquired as to whether the Council would receive all of the funding promised by Central Government to respond to the Covid pandemic. In response, Cllr Alan White referred to the tremendous amount of funding already provided to local councils by Central Government. He also outlined some of the initiatives introduced by the Government to help individuals and businesses such as the furlough scheme.

Cllr Sutton spoke about a number of the Council’s initiatives aimed at helping children and families such as the Building Resilient Families and Communities Programme and the Covid Winter Warmth project.

Supportive Communities – Update and Delivery Plan 2021/22 (Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins referred to a recent Freedom of Information request which had highlighted that Staffordshire had turned down the highest number of social care requests of the 19 local authorities surveyed. She enquired as to what impact this would have on community groups in the County and also whether the County Council was carrying out an audit of these groups to capture the range of services they provided. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that, in Staffordshire, Care Act Assessments were carried out very early on – at the first point of contact – and the data in the FOI request was like comparing apples and oranges.

Cllr Woodward enquired as to how the Community Help Points were working, who they referred individuals on to and whether the requests made to Help Points were captured. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that the 18 Community Help Points signposted individuals to local community groups where they were able to do so. He added that training for community groups was available through Support Staffordshire. With regard to Cllr Charlotte Atkins’ question as to whether the County Council was carrying out an audit of community groups to capture the range of services they provided; and Cllr Woodward’s question concerning whether the requests made to Help Points were captured, Cllr McMahon undertook to raise these matters with the Director for Health and Care to see what could be done.

Covid-19 Lockdown Anniversary (Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Several Members praised the contribution made by the Council and its officers in responding to the Covid pandemic. Cllr Jessel also paid tribute to key workers, including those employed in supermarkets and local shops for the vital roles they had played. She, together with Cllr Dave Jones also praised UK scientists for their speed in developing and producing the Covid vaccine. Cllr Jones also asked that the Leader of the Council call on the Government to provide a monument at the National Memorial Arboretum to recognise the losses as a result of Covid. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that he would be happy to do so when the time was right.

Cllr Philip White referred to the hidden impact of the pandemic such as its effect on people's mental health.

Cllr Clarke expressed his concern at a recent press article which highlighted the number of staff employed in hospitals who had refused to be vaccinated. In response, Cllr McMahon explained that NHS staff took a lateral flow test twice per week and that efforts were being made to persuade the hard to reach groups to be vaccinated.

Schools

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Cllr Pullen, Cllr Woodward, Cllr Sutton and Cllr Oates paid tribute to teachers for their hard work during the pandemic including opening schools for vulnerable children and the children of key workers and providing on-line lessons for those pupils studying at home. Cllr Woodward also stressed the importance of Members of the Council being school governors in order to aid better communication with schools. In response, Cllr Philip White stated that he agreed that there were benefits in Members being school governors and would raise this issue to see if it could be included in the induction programme for Members following the County Council elections in May. Cllr Sutton also paid tribute to the contribution made by the nursery sector and early years providers; and Cllr Edgeller added her thanks to those working in Special Schools.

Cllr Hussain expressed the view that the Covid pandemic had exposed issues around inequalities in education such as being unable to access remote learning which, in turn, had resulted in some pupils being up to seven months behind their peers. He called for extensive help to support those who were most disadvantaged.

Cllr Price also outlined the action taken by schools to ensure that pupils could return to the classroom in a Covid safe environment including the lateral flow testing of children. He added that he supported Cllr Woodward's comments in relation to Members being encouraged to become school governors. Cllr Price also referred to the funding and other support being made available to support pupils to catch-up on their missed education.

Hospitality Sector

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Several Members referred to the impact of the Covid pandemic on the hospitality and tourism sectors within Staffordshire and the need to promote the County as a visitor attraction. Cllr Smith added that he would welcome any support the Council could give

in respect of the bid for the re-opening of a passenger rail service between Lichfield and Derby, providing a link to the National Memorial Arboretum and other visitor attractions in and around Lichfield. In response, Cllr Philip White indicated that the Cabinet, at its meeting on 17 March 2021, approved proposals to enhance assistance to the Destination Management Partnership (DMP), both immediately and for the longer term to lead a transformation of our visitor economy and its businesses. Cllr White added that the Council also supported the bid for the re-opening of the passenger rail service between Lichfield and Derby.

Cllr Flunder also spoke about the impact of the pandemic on the events industry and several other members referred to ongoing work to promote tourism in their respective areas once the social distancing restrictions were relaxed.

Cllr Woodward and Cllr Philip Atkins paid tribute to those businesses who had taken the initiative to diversify during the pandemic such as by providing take-away services, and also those who had helped their local communities.

Staffordshire Day

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Cllr Adams, Cllr Winnington, Cllr Philip White and Cllr Wilson referred to the opportunities Staffordshire Day provided to celebrate the county, from its rich heritage and culture to its stunning locations and places to visit. Cllr Winnington also suggested that, in the future, Staffordshire Day could be used as a celebration to the people the County had lost. Cllr Philip White added that this year, being mindful of the pandemic, the Council has had to be creative about how it can mark the day and, as a result, this year will see the first ever Staffordshire Day Film Competition which will give film makers of all levels the chance to get involved and tell their Staffordshire story.

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

44. Recommendations to the Council

(a) Proposed adoption of new Code of Conduct for Members

The Council were informed that the Audit and Standards Committee had recently considered a new Model Code of Conduct for Members as produced by the Local Government Association (LGA), with a view to its adoption by this Council.

Overall, the new Code was seen as an improvement on Staffordshire's current Code primarily because:

- It applies to the behaviour of members when acting/claiming to act/giving the impression of acting in their capacity as a Councillor and/or representative of their council, or when publicly referring to their role of Councillor or using knowledge that could only be obtained by being a councillor
- It gives clear and concise explanations of each undertaking and the expectations on members

- It clearly states that the whole Code applies to member's actions and behaviour on Social Media

Cllr Woodward and Cllr Charlotte Atkins expressed their support for the adoption of the new Code.

RESOLVED - That:

(a) approval be given to the adoption of the LGA Model Code of Conduct for members with an amendment to the requirement to declare general (pecuniary) interest of relatives and close associates to refer to those *interests known to the member*; the Code to be effective immediately after the next Staffordshire County Council elections (6 May 2021 or any re-arranged date)

(b) the threshold for the declaration of Gifts and Hospitality be confirmed as £50.

(c) the existing Internal Resolution Procedure and Sanctions be applied to the new Code.

(d) the Director for Corporate Services (Monitoring Officer) be authorised to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution.

(b) Pay Policy Statement 2021/22 - Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011

The Council were informed that it was a legal requirement of the Localism Act 2011 for the County Council to have a Pay Policy statement which must be published annually before 31 March. Amongst other matters the Statement must set out the authority's policies for the financial year relating to:

(a) The remuneration of its chief officers,

(b) The remuneration of its lowest-paid employees, and

(c) The relationship between -

(i) the remuneration of its chief officers, and

(ii) the remuneration of its employees who are not chief officers.

RESOLVED – That the Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22 (as set out in Annex A to the report) be approved.

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

Cllr Woodward indicated that the Panel had requested the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to provide them with the numbers of PCSO's, Police Officers and Support Officers employed over the last three years. She asked if this information could also be shared with all Members of the Council. In response, Cllr Sweeney confirm that he was content to share the information with Members as soon as he received it.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins referred to COVID-19 inspection letter from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The

Inspection, which was carried out between 19 and 30 October 2020, noted that staff absence had increased by 63% from April to June 2020. The Panel had asked the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for more information on staff absences during 2020 for both Fire and Police services and if the absence had been due to Covid-19. Cllr Atkins asked if this information could also be shared with all Members of the Council. In response, Cllr Sweeney confirm that he was content to share the information with Members as soon as he received it.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

46. Questions

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

Question

In a press statement from the County Council last week, Burntwood residents were told, “Work to improve routes for cyclists and pedestrians in Burntwood is being proposed as part of a plan to spend £69million on highways projects in Staffordshire” and that “the authority said the money would mean improving signs, junctions and provision for pedestrians and cyclists in Burntwood.” I am aware of the minor improvements to 0.3km of Milestone Way, between High St and Sycamore Rd, that have been agreed; are any additional cycling and walking schemes being proposed, as this press release would imply?

Reply

The 2021/22 Capital Programme contains £128k for provision of the length of cycle route along Milestone Way referred to by Cllr Woodward (0.3km). This is being delivered in 21/22 through an award of Getting Building Funding (£651K) secured via a bid to the S&SLEP for Sustainable Transport Projects. Improvements will be undertaken between the ‘Morrisons Island’ to ‘Aldi Island’ including an upgrade of the existing pedestrian facility and realignment of splitter island. Detailed design is underway, including a review of scheme details to ensure compliance with latest guidance (LTN 1/20).

Unfortunately, national criteria for cycling improvements does not fit more ‘rural’ areas, and we are actively lobbying for consideration on this front.

A Burntwood Town Centre - Public Realm, Connectivity and Highway Improvements Options Report is being prepared with input from Burntwood Town Council (completion mid-April) to identify further improvements for Burntwood. A phased approach to delivery is anticipated beginning next financial year (22/23) as resources permit, to support regeneration of the town centre. The options report considers a variety of interventions and improvements as well as reviewing existing infrastructure including, enhanced public realm, junction modifications, pedestrian facilities, traffic Orders, wayfinding, directional signing, public transport infrastructure and cycle facilities. The report will inform future programmes which may be funded via the Integrated Transport block grant, dependent on the availability of resources and other

spending commitments throughout the County. However, other funding opportunities will be actively sought to aid delivery.

Supplementary Question

When will these minor improvements to 0.3km of Milestone Way be carried out and how is the Cabinet Member going to square the circle regarding the criteria around investment in urban areas verses rural areas?

Reply

The improvements to Milestone Way are contained in the Highways Capital programme for 2021/22. With regard to the criteria around investment in urban areas verses rural areas, I confirm that I have lobbied the Secretary of State on this issue

Cllr Woodward asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Health, care and Wellbeing whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

I am grateful to Cllr McMahon and the Director for Health and Care for following up my question on self-isolation payments at the last Council meeting (page 16 of today's agenda). It appears that the applicant success rate in Staffordshire reflects the national rate of around 30% nationally with 70% of applicants therefore being refused. What impact does the Cabinet Member think this may have had on the willingness of those who are Covid positive to self-isolate and therefore on the transmission rates in our communities?

Reply

There is no data about whether having a self-isolation payment application declined influences people's willingness to isolate. The data we do have about isolation demonstrates that compliance with isolation is on the whole good. We call confirmed cases and their close contacts to verify isolation and the vast majority of these are isolating in line with legal requirements.

A small number of people (around 50 weekly) are referred to the Police because there are reasons to doubt that they are isolating. The Police visit these individuals at home and generally find that they are in fact isolating. A small number of fixed penalty notices have been issued where the legal requirements have been breached.

Supplementary Question

It would appear to me that the 70% failure rate is far too high and seems to indicate that the criteria for applications are perhaps too draconian. The Local Government Association is pushing for changes to the framework for self-isolation payments. Will the Cabinet Member continue to lobby along the same lines as the Local Government Association has made?

Reply

I have written to the Secretary of State to ask that this issue be investigated so that we can be assured that the low success rates of applicants is not having an impact on testing and compliance.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Does the Leader of the Council agree that a one percent pay rise for nurses and other NHS staff is a totally inadequate reward for their sacrifices over the last year, having faced the immense challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Reply

I want to start by acknowledging that the NHS has done an amazing job over the past year.

For many people, the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic are like none they have seen before. People have sacrificed aspects of their lives they took for granted: seeing family and friends, going to school or work, and going to weddings or funerals,

The variety of people who have provided essential services and made sacrifices alongside nurses and other NHS staff during the pandemic are too numerous to list here. Some examples might include: the lorry drivers, without whom food wouldn't get on to the shelves of the supermarkets; the care workers in old people's homes; the teachers striving to ensure our children are educated; our social workers looking after our children and families; and people collecting our bins and cleaning our streets. They all deserve reward for their sacrifices over the last year.

In addition to those listed above are the army of volunteers who seek no reward at all, other than that of knowing they have helped a person in need.

There are others who have also made sacrifices over the past year that also need to be considered. They are the people whose businesses will never recover, and the people who have lost their jobs. There is no pay rise available to them.

I do understand the desire to reward nurses and other NHS staff, I also note that there are others who have sacrificed too; their sacrifice might go unnoticed or unrewarded, because it isn't as high profile, or can't be afforded. Ultimately, the decision about the reward for nurses and other NHS staff will be made by an independent body later this year and we will await their verdict

Supplementary Question

Does the Leader of the Council understand why nurses in particular feel betrayed by the Government and will he urge the Government to accept the recommendations of the independent nurses pay review body?

Reply

As I indicated in my written answer, the matter is to be considered by an independent body later this year and I hope that the Government will take notice of that independent body.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Now schools are fully open, what practical steps is the County Council taking to promote its Air Aware Project to ensure that the pollution from idling vehicles is eliminated? Will the County Council assist schools to measure air quality now and in future months to demonstrate to students and parents the polluting impact of drivers leaving their engines on when parked up outside schools?

Reply

The Air Aware programme played a significant role in improving air quality outside schools prior to the pandemic and the team have continued to work with schools in readiness for the return of all pupils to school on 8th March.

Based on the success of the programme, a bid was submitted to the DEFRA Air Quality Fund last year to expand the programme to other areas in the county. I am pleased to confirm that last week DEFRA awarded Staffordshire County Council £296,828 to engage with schools, businesses, and communities to tackle air pollution. This funding will ensure that the Air Aware programme, including measuring air quality outside schools and anti-idling campaigns, will continue.

In addition to Air Aware, we have a Traffic Demand Management (TDM) programme in place, which also includes tackling issues outside school gates such as parking. Throughout the summer we will be delivering sustainable travel campaigns to encourage more pupils and parents to walk to school.

Supplementary Question

Are you aware that highways operatives working for the County Council are adding to the pollution problem by sitting in idling vehicles whilst they are waiting for their job to start? Can the Cabinet Member issue an instruction to staff not to continue with this polluting practise?

Reply

I would hope that any Councillor who observes such practises by any of the County Council's employees would report it to the relevant senior officer. I, together with Cllr David Williams, will ensure that all employees of the Council are aware that this is not an acceptable practise. We are also looking at the Council's fleet of vehicles with a view to introducing low emission vehicles.

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

Question

Does the Cabinet Member for Highways agree with me that 20 mph is plenty for speed limits around all our schools, play parks, leisure centres and community centres? Will he commit to immediately allocating funding to implement 20 mph zones outside the aforementioned community facilities across the county of Staffordshire?

Reply

Staffordshire maintains one of the safest highway networks in the country by targeting available resources at road safety interventions that have the greatest impact.

Most importantly, we liaise with our local communities to understand their individual aspirations and work collaboratively to tackle any road safety concerns.

20 mph speed limits/zones are just one of a range of measures used by the Council to improve road safety and to create an environment that supports sustainable travel modes, such as walking and cycling. Over fifty of our schools on the busiest roads already benefit from prominent advisory 20 mph speed limits and a further twenty 20 mph speed limit/zones have been implemented in local communities across the county in the last six years.

The full suite of road safety measures includes: a robust programme of targeted engineering schemes, including speed limit reductions; support for communities to install Speed Indication Devices; and engagement with the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership to deliver wide-ranging road safety training/education and Community Speed Watch initiatives.

The introduction of additional 20 mph limits/zones within our local neighbourhoods will continue as appropriate within our county-wide road safety programmes and as local community priorities established through a Members' Divisional Highways Programme.

Supplementary Question

Will the Cabinet Member commit to working with the "20 is Plenty" campaign so that we can build on the work already carried out by the County Council?

Reply

I have already spoken with the "20 is Plenty" group and I can confirm that the Council will continue to work with any group which wants to make any betterment for Staffordshire.

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

Question

Will the Cabinet Member for Highways support my efforts on behalf of residents who live on Hardingswood Road and Second Avenue to see the County Council take urgent, immediate and substantive action to reduce the speed of traffic on these roads and restrict the improper use of these roads by Heavy Goods Vehicles? Local residents and I would also like assistance to see a reduction of vehicles using these roads as a cut through, causing mayhem at peak times due to the tight width of the road, specifically on Hardingswood Road bridges.

Reply

At the request of Councillor Robinson, following local prioritisation through his Divisional Highway Programme, in December 2019 the highways design team commenced a feasibility study, looking into the known issues on Hardingswood Road. An initial request for traffic data was made and the report was commenced in early 2020.

The feasibility study relies on having accurate, up to date traffic data, which over the course of 2020 varied dramatically due to the country going into lockdown. It therefore became necessary to halt the study temporarily until the highways data team could obtain the additional accurate traffic figures. The data is needed in order to assess junction capacity and to inform the designer on such things as traffic volume and vehicle classifications (numbers of cars, buses, HGVs, cyclists) and their typical speed.

In January 2021 work recommenced on the study and the requested traffic data is currently being collected. Once the full set of data has been obtained the design team will conclude their study and report the findings to the local member in the usual way. It is anticipated this will be completed by the end of April 2021.

Supplementary Question

Will the Cabinet Member undertake to work with my successor to ensure that these roads receive the attention they deserve?

Reply

Yes, I will continue to work with local members.

47. Petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

Chairman