

Corporate Review Committee

Thursday 21 January 2021

10:00

Meeting to be conducted using Microsoft Teams - Microsoft Teams

NB. Attendance by the public and press is via webcast only which can be viewed here -
<https://staffordshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

John Tradewell
Director of Corporate Services
13 January 2021

A G E N D A

PART ONE

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2020** (Pages 1 - 6)
4. **Staffordshire COVID-19 Residents Survey - Key Findings** (Pages 7 - 28)
5. **Digital Inclusion** (Pages 29 - 40)
6. **Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2026** (Pages 41 - 58)
7. **Work Programme** (Pages 59 - 64)
8. **Exclusion of the Public**

The Chairman to move:-

“That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of Local Government Act 1972 indicated below”.

PART TWO

(All reports in this section are exempt)

Membership	
Charlotte Atkins	Jeremy Pert

Mike Davies	Bernard Peters
Helen Fisher	Natasha Pullen
John Francis	Stephen Sweeney
Colin Greateorex (Chairman)	Conor Wileman (Vice-Chairman)
Jeremy Oates	Susan Woodward
Ian Parry	

Note for Members of the Press and Public

Filming of Meetings

The Open (public) section of this meeting may be filmed for live or later broadcasting or other use, and, if you are at the meeting, you may be filmed, and are deemed to have agreed to being filmed and to the use of the recording for broadcast and/or other purposes.

Recording by Press and Public

Recording (including by the use of social media) by the Press and Public is permitted from the public seating area provided it does not, in the opinion of the chairman, disrupt the meeting.

Scrutiny and Support Manager: Nicholas Pountney Tel: (01785) 276153

Minutes of the Corporate Review Committee Meeting held on 17 November 2020

Present: Colin Greatorex (Chairman)

Attendance

Charlotte Atkins	Ian Parry
Mike Davies	Jeremy Pert
Helen Fisher	Bernard Peters
John Francis	Conor Wileman (Vice-Chairman)
Jeremy Oates	Susan Woodward (Opposition Vice Chairman)

Also in attendance: Alan White, Mike Sutherland, Victoria Wilson.

Apologies: Stephen Sweeney

PART ONE

20. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made at the meeting.

21. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2020

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 8 September 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. Covid -19 update

The Leader of the Council, supported by the Director of Health and Care gave the following update on the current Covid-19 situation:

- The number of Covid-19 cases was increasing slowly, mirroring the national picture.
- The case rate in Staffordshire was above that nationally and in the West Midlands.
- The NHS, both locally and nationally was experiencing pressure due to increase demand and staff absence due to sickness and self isolation.
- Schools were signalling a degree of stress due to staff shortages and the track and trace process.
- The national lockdown was still in place and should be promoted locally.
- Alert levels may change after lockdown and discussions would take place as to the level Staffordshire would be placed in.
- Staffordshire was one of 60 areas in the rollout of lateral flow testing pilot. This would require trained operators, which there would be no national funding to provide.

- The vaccine situation was looking encouraging.

Work with District/Borough Councils, voluntary groups and large employers was taking place to ensure that there would be sufficient capacity to carry out lateral flow testing.

The NHS would be the lead agency for vaccinations, and they were working on a local delivery plan. It was thought that it would combine large mass vaccination centres and local centres e.g. GP surgery's which could support more vulnerable individuals.

It was felt that the relationships with other tier authorities had work well as had the Central Government facilitating and Local Authorities delivering. This would continue to be promoted. 'I care' volunteers and Organisations such as St Johns Ambulance would continue to provide essential services to local people.

Care homes were being prepared for the programme of vaccination and lateral flow testing. This would probably be introduced through a pilot and then rolled out across the County.

RESOLVED: The Leader and Officers were thanked for their report.

23. Customer Feedback and Complaints Service - Annual Report 2019-20 (Corporate Services)

The Corporate Annual Report of the Customer Feedback and Complaints Services is one of Three reports produced annually. The other two statutory reports concerning Adult and Children's services were considered by the Safe and Strong Select Committee. The Corporate report covered all services including Highways, Library's, Trading Standards etc.

The complaints procedure was briefly outlined. Stage One complaints were down by 30%, Stage two review requests down by five %, and Ombudsman complaints was down by 11% on previous years.

In relation to Stage two complaints, the Committee was informed that it was generally the Highway service that saw more complaints escalated to stage two and it was hoped that this would be addressed with the possible recruitment of a new post that would be able to liaise with customers prior to complaints being made.

A discussion took place on the elderly and what could be done to support those who didn't have access to on line or automated reporting or request for service. It was explained that Adult Services were looking at this area and the introduction of IT Buddies in Libraries should help to support people request services or report problems. Work was also underway to inform Parish, Districts and Borough Councils and the press and voluntary sector of the new buddy scheme so those who need support know how to access it. The Council does have on line systems to make a complaint but we also have direct dial phone numbers for citizens to contact the complaints team.

The Committee discussed the reason why the report was considered at Corporate Review. It was explained that it was considered to be good practise to consider the corporate complaints position and use the information to inform Select Committee work

programmes. Members felt that it was a useful document and suggested that all Members of the Council have sight of the report.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service annual report 2019/20 be noted.
- b) The appointment of the post in Highways to deal with complaints was welcomed.
- c) It was recognised that some complaints were not being captured due to accessibility of online or automated complaints process.
- d) That all Members of the Council should receive a copy of the report for information.

24. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 2, 2020/21

The Committee considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Finance which provided an overview of the Councils progress, performance and financial position in delivering the Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan.

Members queried what was being done to reduce the Adult Safeguarding service waiting lists. It was explained that the increase was largely due to increased demand and the team was prioritizing work. Members requested information on the number of people on the waiting list and the expected waiting times. A question was also asked of the reablement services and what changes to services had been introduced in the way of assistive technology to ensure that people regained independence as soon as possible.

The wide range of support offered to local business was acknowledged. The amount of financial support provided to the County Council to support this was outlined. Members asked for information on any financial support that was being offered by District or Borough Councils.

It was explained that the Family Hubs were administering the £800,000 Defra Emergency food Scheme and that as of 8 October less than £20,000 had been distributed. Members requested an update on the number of families receiving support, the amount spent to date and the strategy to reach those families in the most need.

It was reported that 94% of the backlog in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) was now cleared. With 33% of new EHCP being issued within 20 weeks. The Cabinet Member had requested an action plan to address the continued backlog and this would be shared with the Committee for information.

Information on the £2m investment (on top of the £5m previously allocated) for improvements to road drains, gully emptying, roadside grass cutting etc was requested to go to all Members of the Council.

The report made reference to the Residents Survey which closed in September 2020 and which would inform the Councils recovery and business planning. This information would be reported to Cabinet on 25 November 2020. The Committee asked that the survey findings and the subsequent recommendations come to this Committee for consideration.

The report informed Members that a 5-year action plan to deliver carbon reductions was being developed. Sight of the plan was requested.

The #Doingourbit Community Fund had been oversubscribed and there had been some technical issues with uploading applications. These were being worked through and information would be emailed to Members of the committee as soon as available.

Councillor Woodward had difficulty with the broadband connection and was asked to submit her questions via email for a written response.

RESOLVED:

- a) The report was noted.
- b) The following information was requested:
 - i. The number of people on the Adult Safeguarding service waiting list and their expected waiting times and information on any changes to the reablement services and assistive technology.
 - ii. Request information from District and Borough Councils on the financial support being offered to business.
 - iii. An update on the number of families receiving support through the Defra Emergency food Scheme; the amount spent to date; and the strategy to reach those families in the most need.
 - iv. The action plan to address the EHCP backlog.
 - v. Information on the £2m investment (on top of the £5m allocated) for improvements to road drains, gully emptying, roadside grass cutting etc be circulated to all Members of the Council.
 - vi. The 5-year action plan to deliver carbon reductions be circulated to the committee for information.
 - vii. An update on the #Doingourbit Community Fund.
- c) The results of the Residents Survey and the subsequent recommendations be included in the Committees work programme.

25. Communities Principle - Update and Plan for 2020/21

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture introduced the report which provided an update on the Communities Delivery Plan.

It was suggested that the impact of Covid had hit families with Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) more harshly than most, particularly those out of School/Education settings. Families with SEND children had expressed concern that equipment lent to them for school work could get broken and it was suggested that instead of lending equipment, funds could be provided which would enable families to buy their own so there was less fear of damage or loss. It was reported that there had been a wider piece of work carried out looking at digital inclusion and this could be brought to the Committee for their input.

It was felt that communities were stronger when working together and that there should be more support to identify local need and local solutions based on local knowledge.

The Delivery Plan was currently at a high strategic level but once agreed, detailed plans, with measurable targets would be formulated in order to achieve delivery.

RESOLVED:

- a) The Communities Principle plan was noted.
- b) A report on Digital Inclusion (including those with SEND) be included in the work programme.

26. Work Programme

RESOLVED: That subject to the items requested in previous reports being added to the work Programme, the Work Programme was agreed.

Chairman

Local Members Interest
N/A

Corporate Review Committee – Thursday 21 January 2021

Staffordshire Covid-19 Residents Survey – Key Findings

Recommendations

I recommend that:

- a. The Committee consider and comments on the key survey findings.
- b. The Committee advise of any follow up actions in response to the survey findings.

Report of the Leader of the Council

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

As part of the Select Committee’s scrutiny of Q2 (2020/21) Integrated Performance, it was agreed to share the full findings of the Covid-19 Resident Survey.

In response to this, a summary of the headlines and a full report of the results are included as part of this report.

The Select Committee is asked to consider and comment on the findings and work being undertaken in direct response to the feedback.

Report

Background

1. In order to build an understanding of the impact that Covid-19 has had on people’s lives, and how residents feel about how the county can recover from the pandemic, Staffordshire County Council undertook a survey of our residents.
2. A full report, setting out key results and themes from the survey, can be found at Appendix 1.
3. The online survey took place between 10th August to the 13th September 2020 and was aimed at the Staffordshire adult (18+) population. To reach a broad cross section of communities the survey was well promoted using existing communication channels and networks, and supported by partners and Elected Members.
4. A total of 3,921 completed responses were received, with results highlighting both key social impacts and views on recovery priorities to inform recovery and business planning.

Key Messages

5. The following set out the key messages from the survey findings.
 - a. Majority (63%) experienced overall negative impact, with some at greater disadvantage.
 - b. Key negative impacts - Not seeing family/friends, worried about vulnerable family and loneliness.
 - c. Some evidence of behaviour change:
 - i. Acceleration of digital change
 - ii. Increasing use of the local area
 - iii. Mixed picture for healthy lifestyles
 - d. Local economy a key concern for how Staffordshire recovers.
 - e. Capitalise on rise in community action to further strengthen and empower local communities.
 - f. Build trust and confidence among communities to feel safe.

Reflections and Next Steps

6. Findings from the survey have been shared and discussed with the Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet in November 2020.
7. Key reflections were as follows:
 - a. Timing of survey provides a snapshot in time of resident views, and therefore important context when considering the feedback.
 - b. Results provide a key evidence base that validates thinking regarding the social impact of Covid-19, especially mental health and wellbeing
 - c. Reinforces Strategic Plan priorities.
 - d. Survey feedback underpins our key priorities:
 - i. Communities Principle – Place Based Approach, Supportive Communities & VCSE
 - ii. Economic Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy
 - iii. Digital Programme
 - iv. People Strategy
 - e. Findings from the survey, alongside wider Covid learning, to inform how we deliver against our priorities moving forward.
 - f. Findings to inform MTFs process, considering Covid community impact.
8. Cabinet noted much work is already underway in response to what residents have said matter most. As such, Cabinet agreed that a strong 'you said, we're doing' narrative is published alongside the results to reflect key activities in response to the feedback. Since the meeting, both results and the supporting narrative has been shared widely and can be viewed [here](#). A copy of the 'you said, what we're doing' messaging can also be found at Appendix 2.
9. Resident concerns were also noted and discussed by Cabinet, alongside the challenges and opportunities this data presents. Lead Cabinet Members committed to taking forward the key priorities as part of current and future work

plans and strategies, working collaboratively with other organisations, partners and communities, to take action.

10. In response to the economy being a key priority for the organisation, Cabinet agreed to a standing Economy and Employment item for Cabinet, to reassure the public of what is being done to support this.

11. Finally, Cabinet also supported conducting a follow up Covid-19 Resident survey in May/June 2021, following purdah and elections, to understand how views and opinions have changed and to identify any new or emerging themes. Work on this will commence in the coming months.

Link to Strategic Plan

12. Findings from the survey reinforce current Strategic Plan priorities remain relevant, with direct delivery of all areas of the Strategic Plan informed by the survey results and wider Covid learning.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

13. Detailed scrutiny of the council's activities in response to the findings will form part of specific service plans and activity, with discussion on these taking place at the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee, Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee, Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee or Corporate Review Committee, as appropriate.

Community Impact

14. This report presents a summary of the key survey findings, which will feed into recovery plans and business planning for 2021/22. A full CIA has been completed, and recently updated in October 2020, as part of the council's recovery planning process. As recovery shifts and where significant changes to services occur, individual CIAs will be produced as necessary. As such there is no community impact presented with this report.

List of Appendices:

1. Staffordshire Covid-19 Residents Survey – Summary Report
2. Staffordshire Covid-19 Residents Survey – You said, what we're doing

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Staffordshire COVID-19 Resident Survey Summary report

October 2020



1. Background

In order to build an understanding of the impact that COVID-19 has had on people's lives, and how residents feel about how the County can recover from the pandemic, Staffordshire County Council undertook a survey of our residents.

This report provides an analysis of the survey findings, setting out key results and themes.

The online survey took place between 10th August to the 13th September 2020, and was aimed at the Staffordshire adult (18+) population.

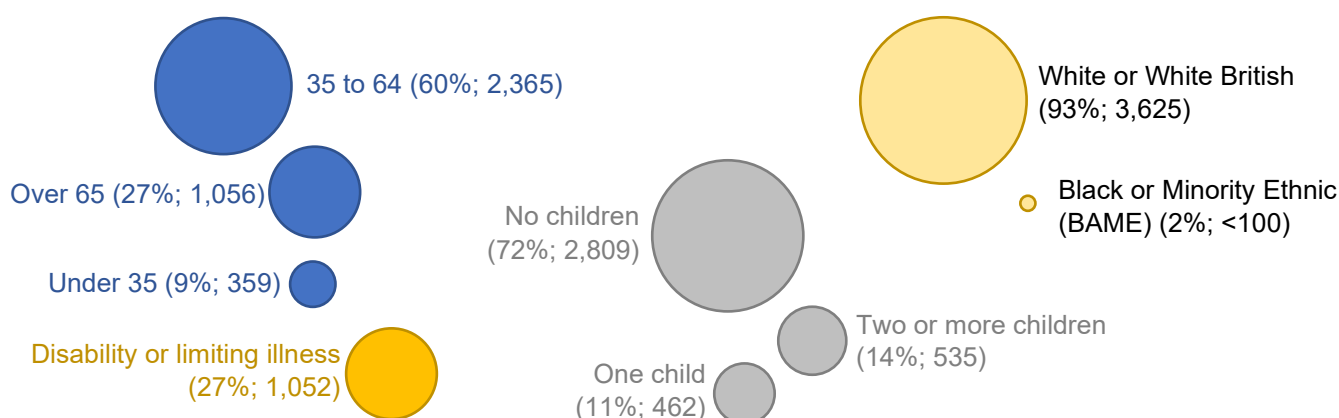
To ensure we reached a broad cross section of communities, the survey was well promoted by partners, in particular District/Borough Councils, key voluntary and community sector partners such as Support Staffordshire. In addition, a wide range of existing County Council networks and community assets were used, including Staffordshire libraries and children centres, Elected Members/Parish Councils, as well, as targeted community groups and press/social media.

A total of 3,921 completed responses were received – the largest response to a County Council cross cutting survey for some time.

Results are statistically robust¹ at a District/Borough level, and at a County level a good response was achieved across age ranges and disability.

2. Respondent Characteristics

Fig 1. Characteristics of respondents



- Female respondents slightly over-representative (66% female, 31% male, 3% other).
- More likely to be middle working age (35-64; 60% of respondents) or aged 65+ (27%).
- Majority were White or White British, accounting for 93% of all responses.
- 27% (1,052) indicated they had a disability or limiting long term illness (LLTI).
- A large proportion (71%) had no dependent children living in their household.

Compared to the Staffordshire population overall, survey respondents were slightly over-representative of female residents, those aged 35 to 64, White or White-British residents and those with disabilities or limiting illness. In contrast, despite targeted efforts, respondents from BAME backgrounds and those aged under 35 were under-represented when compared to the Staffordshire population overall.

¹ At a 95% confidence level, margins of error are as follows:

All respondents/County +/- 2%; Single district or borough +/- 5%; Age under 35 +/- 5%; Age 35-64 +/- 3%; Aged 65 or over +/- 2%

This indicates that should the survey be repeated 100 times, in 95 instances, results would fall within the cited margins of error.

3. Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an **overall negative impact** on day-to-day life for the majority (63%) of respondents, particularly for a number of key groups.

- People furloughed during the pandemic (70%);
- People who have taken a break from work to look after family and/or children (68%); and
- People who have a disability or limiting long-term medical condition (67%).

Key common negative impacts include not seeing wider family and friends (80%), feeling concerned about vulnerable family and friends (55%), as well as loneliness and isolation (35%).

Many (59%) have **embraced new and different opportunities, such as digital technology** to stay connected with loved ones, as well as to help with day to day life. Most plan to keep doing more online. Parents with dependent children (41%) and younger age groups (45%) have spent more time discovering what their local area has to offer, and plan to do this more in the future.

The local environment is considered important to many, 55% of respondents are concerned about it and 10% of free text responses highlighted it as a key opportunity in the recovery of Staffordshire. Respondents particularly recognised the **value of Staffordshire's green spaces** and how important access to and the upkeep of these are.

The majority (over 74%) of those with children have seen the chance to spend more time with immediate family as a positive, but very **few (14%) have found home-schooling to be a positive** experience.

Staffordshire's economy and protecting local jobs was a key theme throughout, in terms of people's greatest concerns (79% worried about local economy) and biggest opportunity (22% see opportunity to develop local businesses). Job creation, regeneration of High Streets and incentives to attract new businesses are all key to recovery.

Fostering community spirit, experienced during the pandemic, is important to many. A large number commented on the **rise in social action** and believe capitalising on the momentum is key a part of Staffordshire's recovery. Reinforcing this is a desire for better engagement with communities, who are keen to be **directly involved in decision-making**.

Access to **healthcare services is a key concern (51%) and identified as a challenge for Staffordshire**, particularly the potential impact of reduced services on longer term health outcomes. The ability to maintain **healthy lifestyles has been mixed overall** – with increases in exercise reported by some (31%), balanced against decreases amongst others (29%). The same is also true for healthy eating, however many are keen to exercise more and eat healthier going forward.

Concerns about COVID-19 guidance and restrictions continue to cause concern and provide local challenges for Staffordshire's recovery. There is a **need for effective enforcement of restrictions** (e.g. social distancing, wearing of face coverings) both in public and in local businesses, with many drawing a link between this and having the **confidence to return to public spaces**. In contrast, there are a number who feel that some guidance (particularly face coverings) makes them feel less confident about returning to public places.

4. Resident Impact

- Nearly two thirds (63%) feel COVID-19 has had an overall negative impact on their life
- Not being able to see friends and family has been the worst aspect for many (80%)
- Just over half were able to benefit from being able to save money during lockdown
- Furloughed individuals and those with disabilities/limiting illness have had the worst experience

Overall Impact

The majority (63%) of respondents felt that COVID-19 had an overall negative impact on their life, with the minority (12%) feeling that the impact had been positive overall.

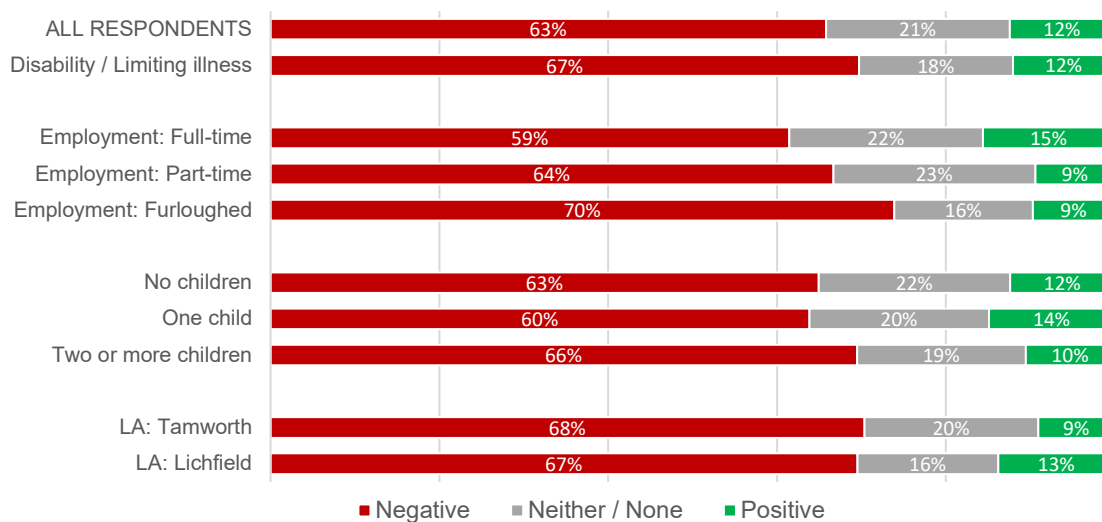
There is little variation in overall impact by age or gender, however, the experience has been more negative for the following respondent groups:

- Those placed on furlough during the pandemic (70% negatively impacted)
- Those who stopped working so they could care for children or family members (68%)
- Individuals with a disability or limiting illness (67%)

No single district or borough appear to have had an overall 'better' experience than average, although some reported a greater negative experience. Respondents from Lichfield (67%) and Tamworth (68%) experienced a slightly more negative impact than others, with the lowest level of negative impact (61%) reported in East Staffordshire – although allowing for margin of error, this is statistically similar to the 63% reported countywide.

Those who remained in full-time employment throughout were more likely to report a positive impact overall (16%), however more than half (55%) of this group still felt the overall impact had been negative.

Fig 2. Overall COVID-19 Impact by key group



Negative Impacts

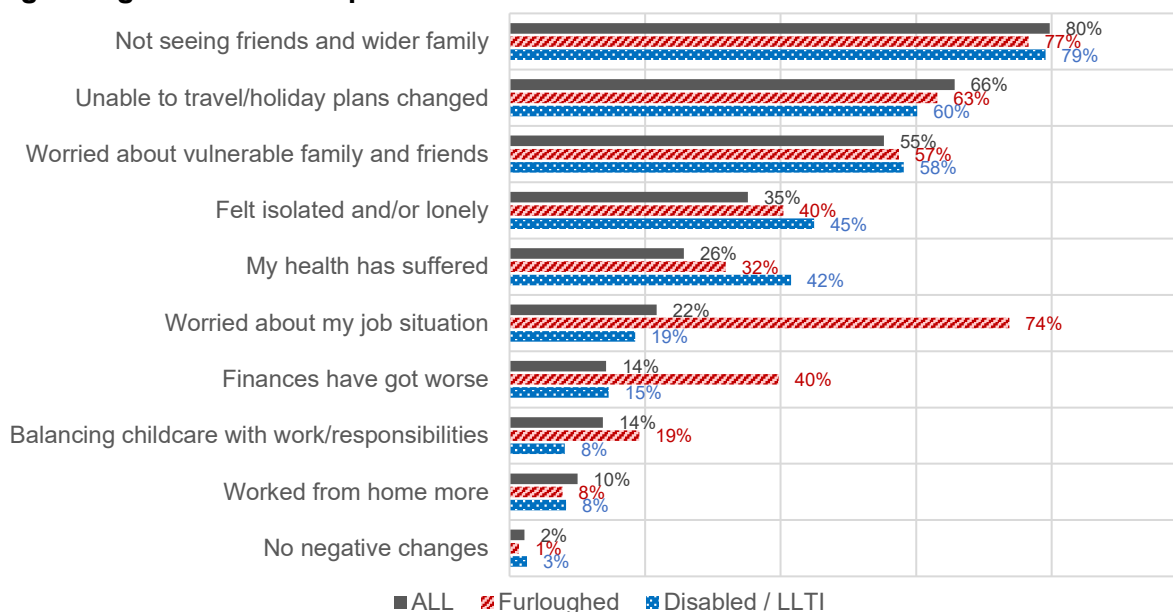
A large majority reported not seeing friends and family (80%) or being concerned about vulnerable friends and family (55%) as key negative impacts. For those placed on furlough, the increase in negative impact may be driven by *worries about their employment* situation (74%, compared to 22% overall) and a *worsening of their financial situation* (40% of this group, compared to 14% overall).

Younger people (under 35's) are also more concerned about their employment situation (39% compared to 24% across all ages) and about their financial situation (43% compared to 31%). Those aged 65 and over were considerably less likely to be worried about household finances

(13% worried). Taking into account the margin of error, those aged 65+ reported similar levels of isolation and impact on health compared to respondents overall.

Those with disabilities or limiting illnesses were considerably more likely than others to have stated that their *own health had suffered* (42% of this group, compared to 26% overall) and were also more likely to have *felt isolated or lonely* (45%, compared to 35% overall).

Fig 3. Negative factors experienced

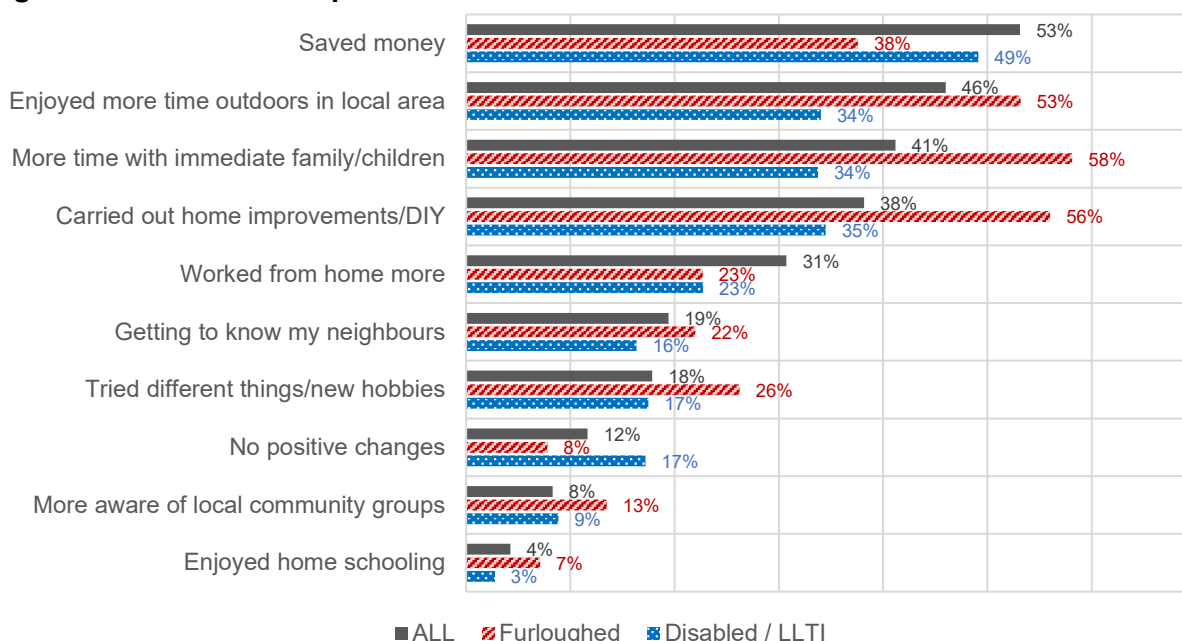


Positive Impacts

Although a much smaller proportion experienced an overall positive impact, many were able to identify some positive impacts, such as *being able to save money* (53%) and *enjoying more time outdoors/their local area* (46%).

Whilst almost half of respondents have reported *enjoying more time outdoors* as a positive (46%), this has only been the case for around a third (34%) of those with disabilities or limiting illness. Those furloughed were more likely to enjoy time outdoors and with immediate family.

Fig. 4 Positive factors experienced



Families with Children

There is some variation among parent respondents - those with one child report the pandemic having less of a negative impact (60%), compared to those with two or more (66%). Although both groups report average positive impact.

Those with two or more children at home have also found it more difficult to *balance childcare with work and other responsibilities* (40% of those with one child, 58% of those with more than one). Home-schooling is generally not perceived as a positive, with very few (14%) parents indicating *home-schooling* to have been a positive outcome.

Employment status

Respondents whose employment status has remained consistent throughout consider themselves to be the least negatively impacted. In contrast, 70% of those who were placed on furlough during the pandemic and 68% of those who were previously working but now looking after family or dependents, consider COVID-19 to have had a greater negative impact. This is also true for those who became unemployed or unable to work.

This survey suggests that the pandemic has had an impact on employment for almost 1-in-5 respondents - 18% (691 out of 3,921) saw their level of employment reduce in some way compared to before the pandemic.

Those who worked part-time were more likely to see a change in their employment than those working full time, with 13% of part-time workers having to look after family or dependents, and 8% being furloughed. Overall, 78% of those working full time prior to the pandemic were still working full-time, compared to just 60% of part-time employees.

5. Changing Behaviours

- Big increase in online activity/use of digital across all age groups, including the over 65s
- Increases in people exploring and making use of their local area (32%) and high street (29%)
- Almost half intend to focus on healthier personal lifestyles going forwards

To better understand how the pandemic has affected people's behaviours and habits, respondents were asked whether they had spent more, less, or the same amount of time doing specific activities. For those doing more of an activity, they were also asked which of these they planned to continue doing in the future.

Fig 5. Proportion with increase in specific behaviours or activities (% of all respondents)

Activity/Behaviour	Did more of	No change	Did less of	Plan to keep doing
Online shopping	59%	31%	4%	47%
Online chat / calling	58%	35%	3%	45%
Discover local area	32%	48%	14%	43%
Exercise	31%	39%	29%	46%
Buy locally / visit high street	29%	33%	35%	43%
Alcohol consumption	27%	46%	10%	9%
Online banking	22%	70%	1%	40%
Eating healthy	21%	56%	23%	48%
New hobbies	18%	66%	7%	20%
Learn a new skill	17%	67%	4%	18%
Time with wider family / friends	6%	26%	63%	46%

Digital

Increased digital adoption to both connect with family members and friends and go about their daily lives (e.g. online shopping). Just under half also plan to maintain this moving forwards. This was true across all age groups, including over 65's where more than half (58-60%) had increased the use of online services for both staying in touch with others and for shopping.

Healthy Behaviours

This presents a more mixed picture. A similar proportion stated they eat *more* and *less healthily* since the start of the outbreak, which is also true for amount of exercise - the larger proportion report no change to these habits. When asked how frequently they are physical active, a similar proportion reported at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week before the pandemic (44%), compared to 43% during the outbreak. Slightly more stated they did fewer than 30 minutes (14%), compared to 21% during.

A similar trend can be seen with alcohol consumption, with 46% stating no change, however the greatest increase in alcohol consumption has been among parents with 40% stating they were consuming more alcohol since the start of the pandemic.

Shop Local

Those aged under 35 were more likely than average to have visited their local high street or bought locally (45%, compared to 35% overall). However, parents were considerably more likely to have done less of this, with almost two-thirds (64%) stating that they had done this *less often*.

Local Area

The environment and local area has been important for both younger age groups and those with children - 45% of under 35s and 41% of parents have spent more time in their local area (compared to 32% overall) and both groups plan to spend more time doing this in the future.

6. Help and Support

- 29% received help and support, primarily to access essential supplies
- Over half (52%) provided support to others during the first wave of the pandemic
- Almost all (91%) of those who provided support, would be willing to do so again if required

Receiving Support

29% (1,128) of respondents received help or support during the pandemic, with common support networks being:



Those with disabilities or limiting illness and those in older age groups, were most likely to have received support during the pandemic; 45% (473) of those with disabilities and 43% (457) of those aged 65 and older. This reflects Government guidance for older and clinically extremely vulnerable groups to self-isolate during lockdown. This is broadly supported by the most popular support need being *getting essential supplies*.

Levels of support varied, with Lichfield and Staffordshire Moorlands both slightly above average, with 32% and 31% receiving support respectively. Respondents from Newcastle-under-Lyme appear to have needed less support than average, with around 24% receiving help.

The range of support needs are set out below:

Fig 6. Individuals supported with specific needs (n=774)

Type of Need	Number and %
Getting essential supplies	427 (38%)
Getting prescriptions	387 (34%)
Mental health (incl. bereavement support)	137 (12%)
Loneliness / befriending	85 (8%)
Food parcels	80 (7%)
Advice about work / employment	68 (6%)
Support with technology (i.e. online shopping)	62 (5%)
Help with own business (e.g. PPE, grants)	49 (4%)
Advice on staying active / healthy	43 (4%)
Financial advice	35 (3%)
Transport	35 (3%)
Childcare	32 (3%)
Support with free food	23 (2%)

Unmet Need

Of those who didn't receive any help or support (2,785), a small proportion (496) stated *they needed help but didn't receive any*. Reasons given were:

- *Ineligible for support* (219; 44%)
- *Didn't feel confident in asking for support* (150; 30%), particularly for those under 35s.
- *Did not know where to go to ask for support* (127; 26%), higher for those aged 65 and over.

Providing Support

Over half of respondents (52%; 2,044) provided help or support to others during the pandemic. Those living in both East Staffordshire and Staffordshire Moorlands (55% from each) were slightly more likely to have provided help and support to others.

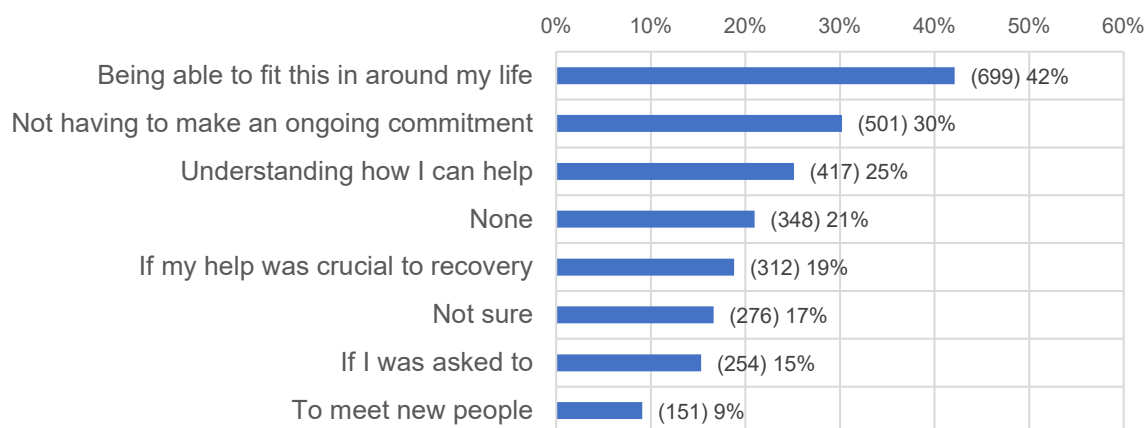
Although those aged under 35 were less likely to have provided help and support, many indicated they would like to know how they can help (14% of under 35s, compared to 4% of other age groups).

There is a strong willingness among this group to continue their support within the community - 91% of respondents who provided help or support would be willing to continue in the future.

Overcoming Barriers

Of the 48% (1,659) who did not provide any help or support to others, the following were viewed as potential opportunities to encourage greater social action.

Fig 7. What would encourage you to provide help and support to others in your community?



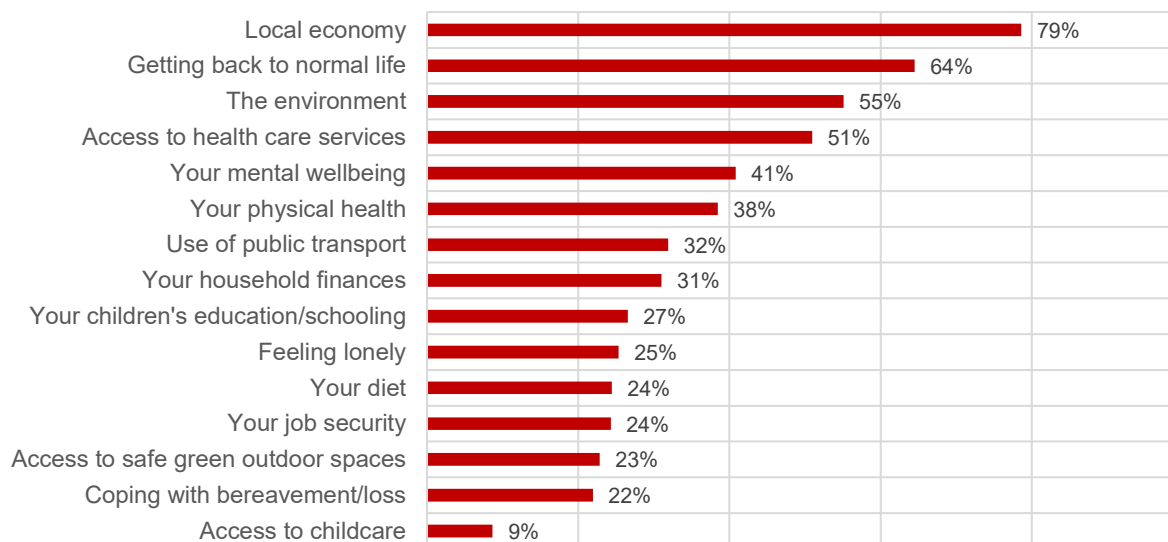
7. COVID-19 Recovery

- Key concerns about the local economy, environment, and access to health care services
- Opportunities to build on community action and further strengthen and empower communities
- Communities keen for more engagement and involvement in decision-making

Greatest Concerns

Respondents were asked what they were most worried about in the next three months, with many expanding on their response.

Fig. 8 Thinking about the next 3 months, how worried are you about...?



The greatest level of concern was the local economy. Free text responses indicate survival of local businesses and high streets, as well as concerns about employment and jobs are key to future recovery. Many respondents also indicated that more needs to be done to “*regenerate the high street and town centres*”.

That said, many indicated that COVID-19 had made them more likely to support local businesses (63%) and around half are more likely to support their local high street (48%). More than half of respondents in all districts reported being more likely to support local businesses, ranging from 59% in South Staffordshire to 68% in Cannock Chase.

Comments also highlighted a key concern in returning to normal life, specifically “*building public confidence and feelings of safety so people feel safe and comfortable in public spaces again*”.

Many provided comments about their concerns regarding the environment, specifically the challenge of maintaining the “*significant reduction in road traffic seen at the start of lockdown*.”

There were some interesting variations in opinion.

- Around 25% of over 65s were worried about their *mental wellbeing*, compared to 61% of under 35s and 50% of those with disabilities or limiting illness.
- Those aged under 35 were also more likely to be worried about how *lonely* they feel (42%, compared to 18% of over 65s), possibly linked to restrictions on social activity. This was also true for those with disabilities (33%, compared to 25% overall).
- Concerns about *household finances* were also above average for under 35s (43% worried, compared to 31% overall).
- *Access to health services* and *physical health* were more of a concern to those with disabilities or a limiting illness.

Challenges and Opportunities

Survey respondents were asked to provide free text comments regarding the challenges and opportunities in helping Staffordshire recover from the impact of the pandemic. These are summarised below.

Challenges (2,643 responses)

Economy and employment (1,038; 39%)

- Grow the economy, create jobs and town centre regeneration

Confidence and trust (952; 36%)

- Communicate and enforce guidance, control outbreaks.

Access to healthcare services (206; 8%)

- Support the vulnerable, and greater focus on mental health impact for children and adults.

Leadership and resources (170; 6%)

- Secure government funding and effective local leadership.

Education and skills (140; 5%)

- Impact of school closures on learning and attainment on life chances.

Maintaining social action (86; 3%)

- Continue to foster community spirit and provide vital support to help groups sustain.

Opportunities (1,953 responses)

Developing local economy (448; 23%)

- Support businesses, create 'future proof' jobs & incentivise businesses to locate here.

Strong sense of community (332; 17%)

- Build on renewed sense of community, help grow and coordinate community groups.

Environment/Climate Change (193; 10%)

- Maintain and promote access to green spaces and develop low emission travel options.

Local Regeneration (175; 9%)

- Regeneration of local high streets/town centres, in terms of retail offer & appearance.

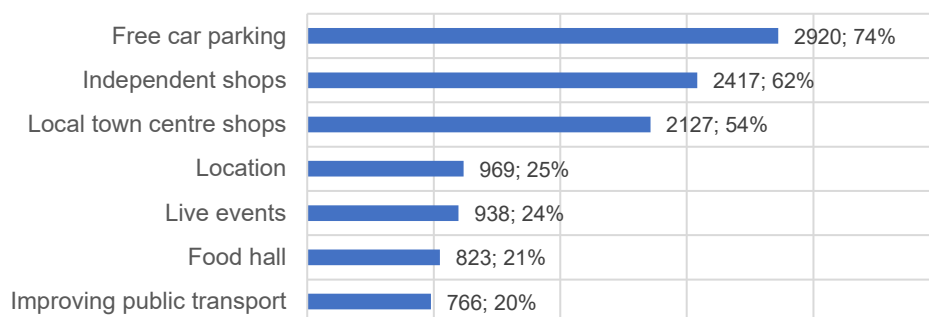
Digital Adoption (152; 8%)

- Consider digital service offer, as well solutions to tackle loneliness and isolation.

NB: Percentages are shown as a proportion of those respondents who provided a response to the question

Staffordshire's local economy was by far considered the greatest challenge and opportunity for its recovery. Respondents gave further views on what might encourage them to support local businesses, with a large majority stating free car parking (74%) and more independent shops (62%).

Fig 9. What would encourage you to support local businesses more?



Improving your Local Community

Over 1,700 free text responses were provided on how Staffordshire County Council and local partners can work with local people to improve communities. Many of the views were consistent with previous comments and have been summarised below. The top three were:

1. Better engagement with communities / involvement in decision making (14%)
2. Crime reduction / Community Safety / Visible policing (11%)
3. Maintenance / improvement of highways / footpaths / cycle-routes (11%)



8. Conclusions

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on day-to-day life for the majority (63%) of respondents, especially for a number of key groups, such as those furloughed and individuals with a disability/limiting illness. Key negative impacts were linked to limited social interaction and impact on people's wellbeing.

Responses represent a positive shift in behaviour as a result of the pandemic, with the acceleration of digital change being most evident. Many have embraced digital opportunities to connect with and support others, as well as help with day to day life. Embedding the County Council's Digital Programme is a key element of recovery, with opportunities to transform future operations whilst also minimising COVID-19 impact

The local environment and sense of place has become increasingly important to people during the pandemic, particularly access to green spaces and a greater awareness of climate change challenges. The development of a new Climate Change Strategy and Community Fund will help to advance this agenda further, ensuring it is embedded across key recovery activity.

There are concerns regarding how Staffordshire recovers, particularly Staffordshire's economy and protecting local jobs. Delivering Staffordshire's 5 year Economic Recovery Strategy is key to ensuring our economy recovers, by supporting businesses to adapt and continue to operate. The work to develop a Staffordshire Place Brand will also be key to attracting new businesses to the county.

Many also recognised the growth of social action during the pandemic, seeing this as a key opportunity to maintain and build on existing opportunities to help grow community capacity and enhance community spirit. Leading the Communities Delivery Plan work is critical to this, through the implementation of a community led offer, increased volunteering and building capacity.

Linked to this there is a desire from communities for further engagement and involvement in decision making. This reinforces the importance of reviewing the County Council's engagement approach, including the delivery of a new Citizen Survey as a regular mechanism for hearing the views of our communities.

Appendix 2: Staffordshire Covid-19 Residents Survey – You said, what we're doing

Local Communities

- Community Help Points in libraries and voluntary organisations providing practical help and support for people to live well and stay independent for longer.
- Regular resident surveys that enable us to listen to what matters most to our communities.
- Doing our Bit Community Fund, offering grants of up to £2,500 to groups that are making a difference to vulnerable older people and children and families.
- Do-It Staffordshire online resource promoting community volunteering opportunities and linking volunteers to people who need support.
- Staffordshire Connects online directory of community support is helping to bring local people together.
- Working with our voluntary and community sector partners to support our communities, such as helping Mutual Aid groups become Good Neighbour Schemes.

Economic Recovery / Supporting Local Economy

- Immediate support to businesses at the start of the first lockdown, including distribution of grants of up to £1,000 to small businesses to support their survival, one million pieces of PPE distributed to businesses and an ongoing campaign of support to keep businesses updated on both local and national financial support.
- Establishing one of the first Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service and County Wide Task Group to support businesses and individuals at risk of redundancy because of Covid-19, and helping them to transition into work in high-growth sectors.
- The #StaffordshireMeansBusiness campaign aims to ensure all local businesses understand the support available to them through a series of newsletters and social media, resulting in a LinkedIn following of over 10,000 and currently 178 individuals taking action to access some form of business support.

- Ongoing support to promote the government's Kickstart scheme to businesses, encouraging those in growth sectors to take on six-month work placements for 16 to 24-year olds at high risk of long term unemployment. This supports young people to get on the career ladder where opportunities no longer exist as a result of Covid-19.
- The survey showed that local people understand the importance of supporting local businesses. The #ThinkStaffordshireFirst is a direct response to this, aiming to raise awareness of how a small local spend makes a big difference to local jobs and communities, especially in economic downturns.
- With an expected rise in the number of people wanting to start up their own business, Staffordshire County Council funded a new Start up Scheme supporting people with how to start up a new business, and preparing them to be more resilient to any future economic shocks.
- Continued development of new strategic employment sites, creating the infrastructure to unlock economic growth, support co-ordinated growth, increase cash injection into the supply chain and create new and better paid jobs e.g. i54 South Staffordshire Western Extension , Stafford Western Access Route and the Stafford Eastgate Regeneration Scheme.
- Continued support to tenants of Enterprise Centres with a rent-freeze, along with the extension and refurbishment of Cannock Chase and Silverdale Enterprise Centres to provide more opportunities for small businesses to start up and grow.
- Helping younger people and those at risk of redundancy with the skills needed for a more digital future through the promotion of a Skills Toolkit, delivering a Community Learning Offer and continuing with the apprenticeship programmes for the county and our schools

Environment and Local Area

- Investment of £100,000 to improve the Rights of Way network to support safe and enjoyable access to the countryside, encouraging more residents to enjoy their local area and contributing to the health agenda.

- Recent bid for funds to improve facilities at country parks, as well as improving an all ability route on Cannock Chase and creating a dementia-friendly trail at Chasewater Country Park.
- Continuing to deliver an intensive highways maintenance programme, including the investment of an additional £2m to improve community highways maintenance, such as problem road drains, roadside grass cutting and more road sweeping. Alongside an additional £8m in LED street lighting, helping to reduce annual carbon emissions and provide savings.
- New Climate Action Fund to fund new projects that reduce the amount of carbon produced, improve air quality or help people deal with climate change events.
- £2.5m of Active Travel Funding to provide additional walking and cycling infrastructure and the move to a greener economy, contributing to the carbon neutral agenda.
- Electric Scooter trials in Stafford and Newcastle under Lyme, introducing an alternative and environmentally friendly mode of transport for commuters, supporting the transition to green travel.

Using More Digital

- Health app finder, making it easier for people to find apps that can help them to stay healthy and well.
- Rolling out virtual social work practice where appropriate, such as video and telephone social care assessments and reviews to prevent the spread of infection to vulnerable people.
- A new Assistive Technology campaign has been launched, with online resources available to help people remain independent in their own home.
- Staffordshire libraries continue to offer a successful digital service, with downloads of e-items increasing by 159% in the last 12 months.
- Staffordshire History Festival was delivered online, promoting wellbeing and networking. The event successfully engaged a significant number of local people, including a Facebook reach of over 66,000.

- Introduction of a new digital IT Support Service, in partnership with Adult Community Learning, which will make digital support more accessible to people who are digitally excluded.
- Investing in superfast broadband, helping to transform day-to-day life for people living and working in Staffordshire, whilst providing a timely boost during this Covid period.

Health and Wellbeing

- More than 3 million items of personal protective equipment (PPE) have been delivered by the County Council to front line care staff, social workers and other roles in direct contact. This has helped ensure every care home/provider has what it needs to care for the most vulnerable.
- Implementation of an Emotional Wellbeing in Schools programme, that is supporting children's emotional wellbeing following their return to school, including training for school staff and promoting ways in which schools can access support for children and young people.
- Increased funding made available to the Staffordshire Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service, delivered by Action for Children, to support children's emotional wellbeing.
- Children's Centres remain open to those families most in need.
- Creation of Family Hubs are providing vital support to families, including working with partners to deliver over 4,000 survival kits to families most in need and offering virtual activities for families to take part in. Children's Centres also remain open to those families most in need.
- The #TalkSuicide campaign aims to bring individuals, organisations and businesses together to help prevent suicide in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, increasing awareness and giving local people easy access to support and training.
- Refreshing our Public Health & Prevention Strategy, with a £750,000 investment to mitigate ongoing public health risks from Covid-19, such as obesity, mental ill health and addiction.
- Everyone Health service is supporting people to stay healthy long term, including weight management, exercise and more. A recent Stay in Touch programme is also helping to combat loneliness during lockdown.

- Staffordshire's Obesity strategy, aimed at increasing the number of people engaging in physical activity, includes a range of local initiatives already underway to improve people's health.

Building Public Confidence

- Implementation of Covid-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan to facilitate the effective management of outbreaks.
- Providing expert public health information, advice and guidance in areas such as testing to help contain the spread of the virus.
- In response to people wanting there to be more 'enforcement' of the rules, we continue to work with Staffordshire Police to check compliance with isolation where we have intelligence that people are not following the rules. We are also working with District and Borough Councils to support businesses to maintain Covid security and enforce restrictions on those that are non-compliant.
- Established a dedicated contact tracing team which carries out local contact tracing for all cases in Staffordshire, contributing to much more rapid isolation of contacts and reducing further transmission of the disease. This intelligence also allows us to act upon outbreaks more quickly.
- The County Council has 7 day specialist advice and response to local outbreak control, including an NHS infection control and swabbing team that can be arranged as and when required.
- Successful roll out of a flexible and responsive testing model across Staffordshire, including most recently the use of lateral flow rapid testing, with results in approx. 30 minutes.

Local Members Interest
N/A

Corporate Review Committee - Thursday 21 January 2021

Digital Inclusion

Recommendation

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Considers and comments on the content of the report and Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2020/21.

Report of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

1. The Select Committee is asked to consider and comment on the work being undertaken to tackle digital exclusion in Staffordshire. Reviewing the approaches in the context of Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, Social Care and Health, Families and Communities and the overall impact on service delivery.

Report

Background

2. Digital is fundamental to the way Staffordshire County Council works as an organisation, as well as how we interact with our partners, citizens and communities. As such, digital is one of the four key principles set out in our Strategic Plan 2018-22.
3. A key part of our approach to digital is ensuring that as many of our residents as possible are digitally included. This includes being able to access and use the wealth of digital information and support available.
4. Digital inclusion (and in turn reducing digital exclusion) concerns making sure that people have the capability to use the internet to do things that benefit them day to day¹. Digital exclusion can be broken down into three key barriers:
 - a. **Connectivity** (infrastructure / access to the internet)
 - b. **Accessibility** (for all including low income homes, people with disabilities etc)
 - c. **Digital skills** (being able to use computers and the internet)

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy>

Digital Inclusion in Staffordshire

5. Digital inclusion was improving prior to Covid-19 but still very much an issue. Following work in recent years to improve digital connectivity in the county, only 4% of premises in Staffordshire do not have access to superfast broadband.
6. A study by Lloyds Bank in 2018 identified five cohorts of people nationally as most likely to be excluded; older people, disabled people, people in low-income households, women, and people who leave education early.
7. Following Covid-19, trends showed an increased use of digital across all sectors. Digital exclusion has reduced in some cases following the efforts to support people at risk during lockdown. However, as many public services shift to a more digitally focused way of working, the impacts could potentially grow more severe for those who remain digitally excluded.
8. Feedback following Covid-19 has shown that a lack of access to affordable devices and internet packages has been a key issue, particularly for older people and low-income households.
9. A huge amount of activity took place across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to provide digital support and information for communities during lockdown. This included supplying digital equipment to vulnerable residents and families, flexible Community Learning offers and VCSE digital support.

Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2020/21

10. As part of the Council's approach to the digital principle, a report will be taken to Cabinet for discussion and approval in February 2021. This report will include the Digital First Delivery Plan. This delivery plan contains 32 key projects for digital, one of which is an action plan for digital inclusion.
11. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2020/21 has been developed as a working document informed by our work to respond to Covid-19. The plan aims to address barriers to digital inclusion in Staffordshire. To do this, the plan has four main elements, each with practical actions that can be delivered in the next 12-18 months. These elements are:
 - a. **Connectivity (and access to the internet)** – Ensuring as many people as possible can connect to the internet where they live and work, especially in rural areas.
 - b. **Accessibility** – Enabling access to the internet, digital devices and / or digital support for everyone, in particular older people, people with disabilities and Special Educational Needs, low income families and people in rural areas.
 - c. **Digital skills** – Helping residents to have the right skills and the confidence to use the internet and digital devices to access the support they need, especially during the social distancing restrictions in place due to Covid-19.

- d. **Communication, engagement and data** – Communicating as effectively as possible the benefits of using digital and the support available to those who may be excluded. In addition, engaging with residents and reviewing data to ensure we continue to understand the issues during Covid-19 and develop our approach accordingly.
12. Further detail on the specific actions in the plan, the delivery leads and the associated timescales for delivery can be found at appendix 1 to this report.
13. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan 20/21 will contribute to several of the Council's strategic priority workstreams moving forward, including:
- a. **Digital First Delivery Plan 2020/21** – Using technology and data to connect, inform and support our citizens. This includes ensuring that residents and staff have the access to the right digital information, skills and equipment to remain connected and supported.
 - b. **Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework (DISF)** – The DISF and its supporting implementation plan will outline the digital infrastructure vision for Staffordshire over the next 10 years. It will address short, medium, and long-term demand for digital connectivity, including (but not limited to) full fibre, fixed Wi-Fi, 4G and 5G. The development of this framework over the next year with key stakeholders will be critical to digital exclusion.
 - c. **Communities Delivery Plan 2020/21** – Empowering communities to help themselves and each other. This includes making the most of our community assets such as libraries and children's centres, as well as working with our VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partner to support both residents and the voluntary sector.
 - d. **Supportive Communities/Community Help Points** – Improved adult social care and health IAG Offer. The Staffordshire.gov.uk web-site content has been significantly refreshed to reflect health and care priorities with specific focus on mental wellbeing, staying active, and staying connected. Links have been made throughout the site to Staffordshire Connects, our community assets directory to support residents to find local support and services.
 - e. **Library Services** – Reading friends service provided by the libraries team is a good example of an alternative that has been provided to people who might be experiencing loneliness/digital exclusion as this is telephony based.
14. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2020/21 has been developed through a range of joint working and engagement activity with Members, commissioners and partners, including:
- a. **Digital inclusion workshop** – An online workshop session was held with commissioning leads specialising in the use of digital in public health, adult social care, children and families, libraries, connectivity, corporate services, Member engagement, local businesses, community learning and the local VCSE sector.

- b. **Engagement with the Digital Leadership Group** – A discussion took place with the Staffordshire County Council Digital Leadership Group and the Staffordshire County Council Cabinet Lead for digital. This session considered the draft action plan and practical steps the County Council and partners can take to tackle digital exclusion, including connectivity and infrastructure.
- c. **Engagement with the Communities Leadership Group** – A session with the Staffordshire County Council Communities Leadership Group also took place. This session considered the draft action plan and how Staffordshire can best use its community assets and relationships with partners locally.
- d. **Engagement with All-Party Working Group** – An update and presentation shared with Members, followed by a discussion and feedback.
- e. **Covid-19 residents survey** – Staffordshire County Council published a survey for residents on the impact of Covid-19. 3921 residents replied, and although the survey was not specifically about digital exclusion, it has provided useful context on related issues facing residents across the county.
- f. **Promotional awareness of action plan** – Digital Inclusion objectives and actions have been shared with Cabinet Community Support Members, and colleagues in our District and Borough Councils.

SEND and Digital Inclusion

- 15. The Digital Inclusion Action Plan will also co-ordinate with the work of Staffordshire SENDIASS, an ‘arms-length’ service that provides support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- 16. As part of the SENDIASS continuing commitment to providing SEND children and young people with impartial and confidential information advice and support, they are exploring communication methods which will best meet the needs of these young people. This currently includes telephone, face to face and email support. SENDIASS have consulted with young people on their preferred digital engagement choices.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

- 17. The action plan was recently discussed at the November meeting of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee, who provided feedback to shape and inform delivery.

Community Impact

- 18. An overarching CIA is being developed as part of the report being taken to Cabinet on the digital principle in February 2021. This CIA will recommend that further assessment be undertaken on key areas of the plan that may potentially impact on communities. If this CIA identifies the Digital Inclusion Action Plan as an area that requires further assessment, then a full CIA will be conducted in 2021.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Digital Inclusion Action Plan

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Appendix 1 – Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2020/21

Priority Area	Actions	Leads	Timescales
1. Connectivity (in co-ordination with the Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework)	1.1. GIGABIT BROADBAND SCHEME – Work with the Government on the GigaBit Broadband Voucher scheme to support internet connectivity for 5% of residents without access to Superfast Broadband in rural areas. SCC have put £1m towards this scheme which the Government are also funding.	Paul Chatwin (E,I&S)	Ongoing (project finishes 31 st March 2021)
	1.2. COMMUNITY FIBRE PARTNERSHIPS – Support residents to put together Community Fibre Partnership bids where there is a need / community desire.	Paul Chatwin (E,I&S)	Ongoing
	1.3. PROMOTE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY – Communicate the benefits of digital connectivity to residents who have been helped to get online through the Superfast Broadband scheme but may be reluctant to use / access broadband.	Mark Russell (E, I &S)	Ongoing (project finishes in 2023)
	1.4. CITIZENS ONLINE AND GOOD THINGS FOUNDATION – Restart work with Citizen’s Online and the Good Things Foundation to explore further opportunities to encourage digital connectivity with communities. This cuts across all areas of the plan, not just connectivity (and includes distributing devices to those in need).	Mark Russell (E, I &S)	October 20
	1.5. SCC INTERNAL CONNECTIVITY AND EQUIPMENT – Ensure that SCC staff has access to the appropriate connectivity and equipment.	Vic Falcus (ICT)	Ongoing
2. Accessibility (including signposting)	2.1. MEMBER ENGAGEMENT ON DIGITAL – Encourage / help Members to promote digital access and signposting of residents to digital resources and support where possible (particularly in areas with higher risk of digital exclusion)	Pete Barker (MADS)	Ongoing / May 2021

Priority Area	Actions	Leads	Timescales
	2.2. DIGITAL GOOD NEIGHBOUR SCHEMES – Work with S3 to promote digital inclusion solutions through Good Neighbour Schemes (e.g. digital doorstep buddies, sharing Wi-Fi passwords etc).	Adam Rooney (Strategy)	Ongoing (VCSE contract year 5 ends July 2021)
	2.3. CO-ORDINATE SCC DIGITAL IAG & SUPPORT – Co-ordinate SCC digital IAG and support to ensure it is up to date, accurate and publicised to communities appropriately (e.g. Staffs Connects, Do-It Staffordshire and Community Help Points where appropriate).	Andrew Donaldson (Corporate)	Ongoing (October 20 – April 20)
	2.4. ACCESS TO DEVICES – Explore potential opportunities (both nationally and locally) to increase access to devices, including through working with the Community Foundation for Staffordshire and the Good Things Foundation.	Laura Ballinger (SDM)	Ongoing (October 20 – April 20)
	2.5. HELLO LAMPOST SCHEME – Explore the ‘Hello Lamppost’ digital IAG tool to signpost / engage residents on digital support and skills.	Wendy Tompson (Strategy)	December 2020
	2.6. POSTCODE CHECKER – Work with the spatial mapping team to develop a postcode checker for residents to get localised messaging, potentially including Covid-19 advice, community support and available digital support.	Rich Lancaster (Digital)	TBC
	2.7. SUPPORT FOR SEND – Co-ordinate the work of this plan with the work of Staffordshire SENDIASS on digital access.	Laura Ballinger (SDM)	Ongoing
3. Skills	3.1. ALTERNATIVE PROVISION OF DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING – Working with libraries to explore ways to continue providing digital skills support during social isolation. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to work with the Good Things Foundation to ensure Staffordshire’s online centres (in libraries) are 	Clare Roberts (CL) Sue Ball (Libraries)	April 21

Priority Area	Actions	Leads	Timescales
	<p>part of their signposting support and device sharing schemes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries volunteers / Digital Buddies to provide 121 phone support for digital skills • Our Community Learning offer going online wherever possible. • Working with Schools and Colleges to offer digital skills support where possible. • Supportive Communities training being delivered by Support Staffordshire which includes digital skills / signposting elements. 		
	<p>3.2. SKILLS SUPPORT FOR DIGITALLY EXCLUDED FAMILIES – Work with Schools to engage with families who received digital equipment during lockdown / struggled to engage with online education to offer additional skills support from Community Learning team.</p>	Clare Roberts (CL)	July 2021
	<p>3.3. VCSE DIGITAL SKILLS SUPPORT – SCC Community Learning team to work with S3 to explore offering specific digital skills support for VCSE organisations, including support for safeguarding online.</p>	Clare Roberts (CL)	April 21
	<p>3.4. INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT – Libraries and VCSE to work together to explore different ways to support campaign for encouraging different generations within a family to help one another with digital solutions (grandchildren and grandparents).</p>	Sue Ball (F&C)	TBC
<p>4. Communication, engagement and data</p>	<p>4.1. #DOINGOURBIT & DIGITAL – Promote to residents through the #DoingOurBit campaign everyday actions residents can take to help get themselves, their families and their</p>	Sarah James (Comms)	Ongoing (October 20 – April 21)

Priority Area	Actions	Leads	Timescales
	<p>neighbours online (building on experiences of lockdown), including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchasing assistive technology digital support equipment for family members who are older / have disabilities • Helping family / neighbours to get connected and use devices • Engaging with local business on how they can support their communities (including with digital exclusion if it is an issue) • Promoting digitally focused Good Neighbour Schemes • ICT Safety myth-busting 		
	<p>4.2. ENGAGE WITH RESIDENTS ON DIGITAL EXCLUSION – Do some focused engagement activity with residents on digital exclusion. This will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be available in a range of formats (including non-digital) • Work with partners including VCSE and Housing Associations Tennant Participation Groups) • Consider how to better identify digitally excluded residents • Consider ways to engage with residents who are digitally excluded and have English as a second language. 	Wendy Tompson (Strategy)	November – December 20
	<p>4.3. UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL INCLUSION – Use and update currently held SCC data on digital use to better understand digital inclusion and agree a set of baseline metrics / success measures for increasing digital inclusion.</p>	Andrew Donaldson (Corporate)	Ongoing (October 20 – April 20)

Priority Area	Actions	Leads	Timescales
	4.4. DISTRICTS AND BOROUGHGS – Work with District and Borough partners to ensure effort / information regarding digital exclusion is shared and coordinated.	Laura Ballinger (SDM)	Ongoing (October 20 – April 20)

Local Members Interest
n/a

Corporate Review Committee - 21 January 2021

Scrutiny of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-2026

Recommendations

1. That the Committee agree their final report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021-26, subject to any amendments, for submission to the Cabinet at their meeting on 27 January 2021. The final report is attached as an appendix to this report.
2. If the Committee does wish to make amendments, it is recommended that the Committee give permission to the Chair to approve the final version.

Report of the Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group

Report

Background

3. The Committee is responsible for scrutinising the development of the County Council's MTFS and the annual budget and council tax setting process. The work of scrutiny helps to ensure that the Council develops a good and balanced budget, which is in line with the Council's aims and objectives and is used as a base to determine spending. As part of the Committee's Work Programme Planning for 2020/21, Members agreed to set up a Working Group to undertake this work.
4. The attached final report sets out details of the work the Committee's Working Group has undertaken between July 2020 and January 2021; and their conclusions and recommendations for submission to Cabinet. Members are now asked to agree this report for submission to the Cabinet for their response.

Next Steps

5. Any amendments to the report which are requested by Members will be made and the report provided to the Chair for final approval. The report will be circulated to Members of the Cabinet prior to their meeting on 27 January 2021.
6. The Chairman will present the final report to the Cabinet who will consider the conclusions and recommendations and will provide a response to each one. The final consideration of the MTFS will take place at the County Council meeting on 11 February 2021. Council will be provided with details of scrutiny recommendations and the Cabinet's response as part of that report.

Link to Strategic Plan

7. The MTFFS is the financial expression of the aims and objectives of the County Council, which are set out in the Strategic Plan.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

8. In preparing their report, the Working Group have taken into consideration any work undertaken by the County Council's Select Committees where budget related matters were raised.

Implications

9. The equalities and legal; resource and value for money; risk; and climate change implications are referred to in the attached report.

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Appendices/Background papers

Final Report of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021 – 2026 Working Group

Corporate Review Committee

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021 - 2026

Final Report of the Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group

Chairman's Foreword

In any normal year, local government finds it a particularly challenging and uncertain time in relation to financial planning and strategy. The Covid-19 virus effects have provided an added dimension and the Working Group has had to take these circumstances into account and attempt to be constructive and understanding in its approach to its investigations.

Partly because of the absence of any meetings in the early part of the Covid-19 virus lockdown, the Working Group has had fewer opportunities to meet to discuss MTFS issues. This year, however, it has provided an opportunity to look more outwardly rather than inwardly, including an input from Mr Adam Lent, Chief Executive of New Local (formerly NLGN) on Sharing Best Practice. Hopefully, as well as highlighting some strong recommendations based on other local authority approaches, it will open up the idea of using more external input to financial strategy discussions. Online meetings and the absence of travel time and cost actually help to facilitate such input.

There has been a strong element of experience in the group with all four standing committee chairmen represented, as well as the current and former minority group elected Members. This has been helpful in the widespread knowledge of the group in those areas that have previously been the subject of budget pressures. The elected Member experience has also been a useful input in consideration of Covid-19 virus effects on the MTFS outlook.

While the impact on Covid-19 and economic recovery have been key elements of our investigations this year, we have also been aware of the key risk areas around the 'Care' services. The New Local input has allowed our recommendations to take in the guidance of strategies that are shaped by principles of Early Help, Prevention and the understanding of Social Determinants impacting on demand, i.e., the local environment, health and wellbeing, housing and jobs. Our approach with those Cabinet Members interviewed was to consider their understanding of these issues in order to contribute improvements to the MTFS landscape.

At the same time we took a risk based approach to our evidence gathering, allocating more time on those services which had potentially the greatest impact on the deliverability of the MTFS. The pandemic has naturally and understandably tended to focus government response to the immediate fight against the virus. However it is essential that the issues involved in addressing the longer term funding of local government are not forgotten and will invariably be an on-going part of the work of the group in future years.

The Group is grateful to all the officials who administered the process, particularly Nick Pountney, Carol Bloxham, Rob Salmon and Rachel Spain. I would like to thank Members for their enthusiasm, pleasant camaraderie and insightful work. All the above have had, this year, to operate not only within a shorter time frame but also conducting the process in a total work from home and online basis.



**County Councilor Colin Greatorex
Chairman
Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group**

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. Overall, given the assurances we have had to date, we feel it has been demonstrated that the process of preparing the County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021 – 2026 and setting the 2021/22 Annual Budget and Council Tax has been thorough and robust. We have accepted assurance from the Leader and his Cabinet that they constantly monitor and review the assumptions made and we can conclude therefore that the proposals meet the principles of a good and balanced budget, subject to our comments, concerns and recommendations, which are set out in this report.
2. Over recent years the County Council has significantly reduced its running costs, whilst spending a record amount on social care for a growing ageing population as funding has reduced. The growing demand in this sector is a national challenge rather than a local one and central Government should lead on finding sustainable long term solutions. Demand continues to grow in the care sector – both adults and children.
3. This year we have faced an unprecedented challenge in the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected the running of the Council in many ways including reassigning staff to delivering food parcels and Personal Protective Equipment, delaying planned savings programmes and reducing the amount of council tax and business rates collected. Furthermore, the council has spent more than has been received in emergency support from central Government to help residents and businesses through the crisis. Like councils across the country, we are faced with significant challenges as recovery plans are worked through and the council has committed to directing all of its resources to help people and businesses get moving again.
4. It remains important to continually challenge major risk assumptions within the MTFS and this is the responsibility of the whole Council. This year the impact on Covid-19 and economic recovery will be a key element. Other key risk areas continue to be around 'Care':
 - Looked after children
 - High needs blocks in schools (SEND)
 - Care home prices
 - Public health grants
 - Delivery capacity
5. The County Council must continue to transform the way it delivers services to meet the ever increasing demand for care services, best practice and ensuring value for money. The Council must continue to work towards strategic cooperation and engagement with other public bodies to maximise potential of public funds.
6. The impact that Brexit will have on Staffordshire is difficult to assess. The County Council's risk assessment has been adjusted to take account of Covid-19 and Brexit.

Recommendations

7. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, people have shown exemplary community spirit. The County Council must now work with wider communities collaboratively – recognising strengths and building capacity. Facilitating strong networks will result in self-sustaining communities. The Council must engage better and sufficiently with parish and town councils and the voluntary sector. This is vital and is not yet happening. Now is an opportunity for parish councils to reflect and reorganise their approach to supporting their communities especially the most vulnerable and isolated and the Council must facilitate this and encourage them to be ambitious.
8. The County Council must engender a supportive culture amongst staff in which problem solving and measured risk taking is encouraged and front line staff - who have first-hand knowledge of systems and processes - should have capacity to adapt their approach. In such an environment, decision making can be delegated, where possible, to the lowest level within a framework of cross party working.
9. The key to successfully integrating a new culture – one which builds resilient communities and limits expectations on local authorities - is good leadership and the importance of a simple message or narrative. Repetition of a message (which is incumbent on all Councillors) and Emulation (Cabinet Members and senior leaders must embody these values) can be powerful.
10. We urge Cabinet to be open to learn from best practice evidenced elsewhere via platforms such as New Local.
11. Changes in governance should be informed by the experience of front-line staff. Integration must be inclusive of the wider community and the County Council must learn from some interesting techniques which are emerging.
12. It is important that all members are regularly and comprehensively updated around progress against the Covid-19 recovery priorities and it is vital that all members recognise their role in engaging proactively with the process.
13. The MTFs is predicated on various elements which include lobbying of Members of Parliament and the County Council must be proactive to ensure it can fulfil its roles and duties and improve lives for Staffordshire people.
14. We believe there needs to be a fundamental review of the savings plan and that there may be service areas which require additional funding rather than being expected to achieve savings. In managing our assets, the focus needs to be on getting it right first time and delivering savings for the longer term.
15. To bolster Staffordshire's economic recovery, we urge Cabinet to ensure young people are retrained into growth industries, identifying skills which will be necessary and providing opportunities.
16. We believe mental health will become the next priority in terms of public health and the County Council and NHS partners must be proactive and integrated in their response.

17. We caution against transferring everything to a digital platform and assuming savings will follow – rather challenge core thinking especially around the re-modelling of the County Council; be innovative and not simply get drawn into national trends. A twin tracked strategy for example which addresses where AI can allow staff to refocus on the greatest added value services.
18. We emphasize the importance of regularly reviewing major assumptions and challenging anticipated pressures within the MTFS.

Scope

19. The County Council's five-year MTFS provides the financial framework for the delivery of the Council's Strategic Plan. The MTFS Working Group of the Corporate Review Committee is responsible for providing challenge during the development of the Council's MTFS and the annual budget and council tax setting process. The work of scrutiny helps to ensure that the Cabinet develops a good and balanced budget. This year the working group has asked searching questions of the Leader and Cabinet Members responsible for Finance, Commercial Matters and Digital and has had a discussion session with the Chief Executive of New Local (formerly NLGN) on sharing best practice in local government.
20. We strongly believe all Members have a corporate responsibility to manage expectations and towards delivering the MTFS. The Council pledges to deliver value for money for its residents and business and to live within its means.
21. This year has been overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic. In some areas activity has paused or changed due to national restrictions or the need to redeploy staff. The pandemic has also accelerated support for community action and volunteering and in the digital transformation of the way the council's staff work.
22. The pandemic has had an impact on planned savings which has resulted in a cost in 2020/21 of £10m in delayed or unachieved savings.
23. Accepting these difficult circumstances and the amount of uncertainty, we decided we could best add value by looking ahead and exploring key themes.
24. A good and balanced budget is one where:
 - It has a medium-term focus, supporting the Leading for a Connected Staffordshire Business Plan.
 - Resources are focused on Vision for Connected Staffordshire and priority outcomes.
 - It is not driven by short term fixes.
 - It demonstrates how the County Council has listened to consultation with local people, staff and our partners.
 - It is transparent and well scrutinised.
 - It is integrated with the capital programme.
 - It maintains financial stability.
 - Expenditure matches income levels.
 - Savings targets and investment proposals are credible and achievable.
 - Key assumptions are "stress tested".

25. In assessing whether the budget is good and balanced the Committee had reference to:

- financial strategy in the wider planning context;
- how the budget is constructed and decisions made;
- what criteria, information and consultation shape the budget;

Method of Investigation

26. A risk based approach to our evidence gathering was used this year, focussing proportionately more time on those services which had potentially the greatest impact on the deliverability of the MTFs. We decided to conduct seven interviews:

- Mr M Deaville, Cabinet Member for Commercial Opportunities
- Mr Alan White, Leader and Mr Mike Sutherland, Cabinet Member for Finance on COVID-19 recovery plans
- Mr Adam Lent, Chief Executive of New Local (formerly NLGN) on Sharing Best Practice
- Mr Mike Sutherland, Cabinet Member for Finance on the Digital Platform
- Mr Alan White, Leader of the Council and Mr Mike Sutherland, Cabinet Member for Finance interviewed in respect of MTFs and the Autumn Settlement

Budget Interviews

Date of Interview	Interviewee/s
11 August 2020	Scene setting meeting with County Treasurer
7 October 2020	Mark Deaville, Cabinet Member for Commercial
3 November 2020	Alan White, Leader of the Council Mike Sutherland, Cabinet Member for Finance
19 November 2020	Adam Lent, New Local
3 December 2020	Mike Sutherland, Cabinet Member for Finance (including Digital portfolio)
7 January 2021	Alan White, Leader of the Council Mike Sutherland, Cabinet Member for Finance

Membership

27. The membership of the MTFs Working Group is:

County Councillor Charlotte Atkins
County Councillor John Francis
County Councillor Colin Greatorex (Chairman)
County Councillor Jeremy Oates

County Councillor Ian Parry
County Councillor Jeremy Pert
County Councillor Martyn Tittley
County Councillor Sue Woodward

Findings

General

28. In addition to the anticipated significant financial impact of the pandemic across the entire public sector, a growing, ageing population, rising costs and growing demand for our services mean that more fundamental changes are required.
29. The County Council has changed significantly over the last decade and can no longer afford all the things it used to do or would like to do. It has had to look to find different ways of working that help people to help themselves, take greater personal responsibility for their own lives, health and wellbeing, and greater responsibility for improving their own communities. That pace of change must accelerate in the changing financial landscape. If we succeed in this and reduce demand on public services, the County Council can target the reducing resources where there is most need.

Learning from New Local

30. New Local (formerly New Local Government Network) is an independent think tank and network which aims to transform public services and unlock community power. Adam Lent, their Chief Executive shared his interpretation of how councils are addressing fiscal challenges. He believes there is a strong awareness across the sector of the medium and long term risks. In the wake of the pandemic, there are on-going health vulnerabilities, serious concern about the economy and disruption to the labour market especially on young people. These challenges and Brexit mean significant uncertainty and disruption to local government which is likely to last for some time.
31. He describes local authorities as stuck in a vice like grip of increasing demand and reduced funds and he complimented us as a working group for embracing the challenge in our work programme.
32. Councils are responding in different ways and there are clear measures that can be taken to mitigate fiscal challenge but we agree that the only effective and sustainable response is to reduce demand.
33. Reduce demand by identifying those who are likely to be a source of demand (Early Help) and intervene before they become a strain on resources and there are good examples of focussed work in local authorities. Secondly, Prevention is more than early help and is about setting up networks and introducing public health programmes. Thirdly, focus on the social determinants which impact on demand – the local environment, health and wellbeing, housing and jobs.
34. Councils must work with communities in a different way – collaboratively – recognising the strengths in communities and encouraging these. Facilitating strong networks will result in self sustaining communities.

35. Adam Lent referred to the importance of front line workers as some councils have freed up front line social workers to take a problem solving approach mentality as they can have a greater understanding of problems and barriers. Some authorities have completely redesigned their service to enable this to happen. Kings Fund research on Wigan Council's social care service evidences the effect of front-line autonomy in both saving money and reducing demand. The County Council must engender a culture in which problem solving and measured risk taking is encouraged.
36. We are not surprised that where the NHS is fully integrated with the local authority, the best results are achieved.
37. Although evidence around Direct Payments is mixed, there is benefit in people grouping together and networks can be powerful. Parish and town councils and wider community groups should be supported in building capability. The Leader told us he has forged a good working relationship with second and third tier authorities.
38. We accept that traditionally local authorities have been risk averse, especially around children's services. There is pressure to balance safeguarding and efficiencies but there are examples of innovation in early help and prevention. Gateshead Council for example has focussed on people who repeatedly failed to pay their council tax as an indicator of a family who would likely be demanding on services. Early knowledge of such indicators is very useful.
39. Adam Lent accepts that timeframes are long – it takes time to change the culture of a council and the expectations of a community. He believes key to success is good leadership and the importance of a simple message or narrative; the power of repetition of this message (incumbent on all Councillors); and, the power of emulation, senior leaders must embody these values. Councils need to be brave!
40. We believe that a significant social determinant for good health is stable employment and this is a real challenge in the post Covid recovery period. There needs to be an integrated approach – including public health and NHS. Outcomes based commissioning is proving successful elsewhere. Adam Lent endorsed the approach of integration around front line services rather than governance. Governance change should be informed by experience on the front line. Integration must be inclusive of the wider community and we note some interesting techniques are emerging.
41. New Local is in the early stages of exploring the use of mobilised communities to generate economic growth. There is overlap, and for communities who want to support local businesses, community asset transfer is a way to rebuild.
42. Post Covid it will be important for the Council to create an environment which facilitates change and brings employment and prosperity to the county by working closely with MPs and local government networks. Growth in business will support public services and we are pleased the Leader is working with the LEP to identify and deliver projects across Staffordshire and identifying new funding streams.

43. We found the session with Adam Lent to be extremely useful and we urge Cabinet to be open to investigate, learn and adapt from best practice evidenced elsewhere and via platforms such as New Local for Staffordshire.

COVID-19 Recovery Plan

44. This year, the impact of Covid-19 has been felt across all services. In February 2020 the MTFS was in a balanced position across all 5 years by implementing a significant cost reduction programme together with using one-off resources in the early years. In the light of the pandemic, the MTFS has had to be regularly refreshed taking into account emerging pressures whilst supporting those most vulnerable residents in Staffordshire.

45. Due to its size, Staffordshire receives a significant allocation of any grant funding and it has good control over its finances and a good track record of responding positively when savings plans are introduced.

46. We have explored the Covid-19 impact, the learning from the recovery phase and the high level priorities for recovery with the Leader. It is important that all members are regularly and comprehensively updated around the recovery priorities.

47. Government grant aid was not prescriptive but could be used to alleviate any financial impact of Covid-19 – shortfall in savings or lost income - and the Council has to report to Government monthly on how it has allocated grant funds. There were three elements to the Covid-19 response:

- Direct response (Personal Protective Equipment/food distribution to shielding residents)
- Impact of lost income
- Delays to the savings plan

48. Approximately £100m has been received from Government due to the financial impact of the pandemic. Currently the additional expenditure is forecast to be around £1m more than the amount of grant received. Direct expenditure is largely covered and loss of income is managed but the impact on the savings plan is concerning and ongoing. Over £16m in Covid-19 support has been included in the MTFS.

49. We are pleased the Council is promoting Think Staffordshire First – using collective public procurement to support local businesses in community wealth building. We note that the Council will continue to promote local businesses but there is no collaborative procurement with DWP or NHS. The Council had accelerated its payment terms to help small businesses – representing about £20m acceleration.

50. We understand it would be difficult for the Council to contribute – if directed by Government – to the overall national recovery. The MTFS is predicated on various elements including lobbying of MPs to ensure we can fulfil our roles and duties and improve lives for Staffordshire people.

51. We believe there needs to be a fundamental review of the savings plan. There may be service areas which require additional funding rather than being expected to achieve savings. In addition to the £62m of savings already agreed to be delivered by 2024, a further £25.8m is included in the current MTFS for delivery by 2026.

52. We understand that despite the third lockdown, the budget for 2021-22 will be managed and that the impact would be on delayed savings - £10m in the current year and the same in the following.
53. We are aware of the significant contribution volunteers have made in their communities and the incredible uptake in volunteering since March 2020, but we are concerned about volunteer fatigue. The Council must ensure there is a sufficient and resilient source of volunteers going forward and redirect their energy as restrictions ease, our economy recovers and normality returns. The staff initiative I Care I Count has been effective. We urge Cabinet to engage better and sufficiently with parish and town councils and the third sector which can really help at ground level. This is vital and is simply not happening yet. Now is an opportunity for parish councils to think about and reorganise their approach to supporting their communities especially those most vulnerable and isolated. The Council must support parish councils to be ambitious and explore their potential.
54. We are aware that a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) taskforce is focussed on supporting economic recovery which would be strategic and county wide and focus on the short, medium and long term. Sectors such as Tourism and Leisure and Performing Arts which are important to Staffordshire have been badly hit during the pandemic.
55. We urge Cabinet to ensure young people are retrained into growth industries, identifying skills which will be necessary and providing opportunities. The Leader hopes that the seven investment sites being developed in the county would provide opportunities.
56. The Council has a role in delivering infrastructure to create conditions for housing and better paid jobs and in facilitating business centres although not directly providing jobs. The Council must try to attract high quality growth industry to the county and ensure schools are turning out appropriately skilled young people.
57. We hope that health partnerships are ready for greater demands in emotional health and wellbeing. We accept there is a significant challenge in balancing controlling the spread of the virus with people's emotional and physical health and wellbeing and with economic recovery. We understand that there has been a good, no-nonsense working relationship throughout the pandemic with NHS partners and this must continue. We believe mental health will become the next priority in terms of public health and the council and NHS partners must be proactive in their response. This is likely to be a long term request for many years after the pandemic.

The Digital Platform

58. In a previous interview, the Leader acknowledged that parts of the county still did not have great connectivity and improving this was a priority. 5G is new technology which would significantly improve the economy and was the subject of a bid to Government.
59. Adam Lent had shared examples of local authorities using Digital to drive innovation but every council has had to make huge leaps in their digital programme

due to the pandemic. Some councils are well on the way to becoming completely digitised and renting out unused office space.

60. The Cabinet Member with the Digital portfolio told us that Digital is streamlining business and delivering, that it needs to be an intrinsic part of every business plan and is now a key principle in the council's vision. Digitisation required culture change but huge progress had been forced on councils due to the pandemic.
61. We asked about Assistive Technology, aware that the elderly and families on low incomes were most likely to be technically challenged. While we accept that digital exclusion is a matter for Select Committee scrutiny, there are clear cost implications where it goes wrong. We understand there has not been the investment in AT as had been planned. The Cabinet Member said that the Councils' role was to provide a vibrant marketplace so that clients can understand what is available and make choices. The Happy at Home campaign enabled people to explore options on the website.
62. We were assured that the council is clear in its approach – digital first but not exclusively. Libraries were being mobilised into community information hubs where clients can continue to have face to face contact and so a blended approach will continue.
63. Digital apps – such as My Staffs – are giving people more control – for those who are able and want to engage, the council is making it easier to do so but will work to avoid any exclusion but the Council should not raise resident's expectations of quick resolutions.
64. We asked the Cabinet Member about the costs where digital falls short. The Cabinet Member agreed that more is needed in terms of infrastructure supporting such as My Staffs app.
65. We acknowledge that an all member event on Digital is scheduled as we feel all members need to be kept up to date with activity. We fear there is low confidence in some digital programmes due to poor customer experience. The Cabinet Member assures us that work is ongoing to improve the back end of digital services to match the front end. He accepts there is frustration in some cases and agrees that there needs to be robust infrastructure to ensure customer confidence. The service must build system confidence.
66. We asked the Cabinet Member if there is a focus on the big spend opportunities for digital innovation but we suggest there is no need to over invest in digital where the current system is working well. We caution against transferring everything to the digital platform and assuming savings will follow – rather challenge core thinking especially around the re-modelling of the council. We also urge the Council to be innovative and not get drawn into national trends. Artificial Intelligence advancements are likely to overtake us and the County Council must be focussed sufficiently far ahead.

Commercial Opportunities

67. The Cabinet Member for Commercial said that NEXXUS had protected the Council against market failure given the fragility of the social care provider market. They

had provided quality care in an area where no service provider was available at a price the Council could afford. It was a wholly County Council owned arms-length company. The pace of growth had concerned the Cabinet Member but NEXXUS had successfully managed growth of over 290% over 12 months.

68. NEXXUS had managed to stabilise a challenging market and had even returned a small surplus which would be reinvested in the company to further benefit the service provided.
69. We asked the Cabinet Member whether there had been any adverse effect on smaller private companies providing care who may now be challenged by NEXXUS's hold on the market. He confirmed that their focus remained on filling gaps in the market. NEXXUS is a framework provider with the same terms and conditions as other providers in the marketplace.
70. The other arm of the business is re-ablement: returning people home from hospital within 6 weeks to avoid their becoming dependant on care.
71. We acknowledge the increased fragility of the social care market due to the pandemic and asked whether NEXXUS is sufficiently robust to respond to likely further challenge and demand anticipated in the care sector. The Cabinet Member realised that there were greater challenges ahead due to the ongoing pandemic and whilst he would have appreciated a period of stability, he believed NEXXUS was in a good position to step up when necessary.
72. A recent CQC inspection had rated NEXXUS as 'good' and they had undertaken a vital role in training volunteers to deliver short term care as the COVID-19 cases spiked in March 2020.
73. We reminded the Cabinet Member that NEXXUS has a responsibility to the taxpayer and must continue to strive for value for money. The adult care market is highly competitive and NEXXUS will have to ensure it stays lean and efficient. They must continually test the market and may need an exit strategy at some point. There is no room for complacency.
74. We asked what risks are associated with NEXXUS operation and understand that they have digitised the service to mitigate risk – data sharing across all contributors was comprehensive. This gives the board absolute control and facilitates better working for carers. Governance, overview and quality key performance data is shared on a monthly basis.
75. The schools support market had changed significantly since Entrust had been established. The County Council would carefully consider its position and watch market conditions across all aspects of Entrust work before making a decision on its shareholding in 2021. There was no financial liability on the Council. The MTFS did not include any dividend from Entrust and none was expected.
76. We challenged the Cabinet Member on climate change. He believes that climate change is embedded in all areas of service and business, that attitude and culture are changing in line with the green agenda and any contractor or supplier engaged must share the same focus and values.

77. Many organisations with which the council is contractually engaged are forward thinking in their policies on green issues.

MTFS - Settlement

78. The Provisional Settlement was announced on 17 December and for one year only. Reform of local government funding had been long anticipated and lobbied for and a three year settlement would have allowed for some planning but a roll over situation does not.

79. There is an additional amount of £4.4m allocated for social care, both Adults' and Children's. This is in addition to the £20.8m Social Care Support grant announced in 2020/21 which will now continue at the same level as in the current year.

80. The Revenue Support Grant will also continue in 2021-22 and has been inflated, this same lower rate of inflation has also been applied to the business rates top-up payment. The allocation for New Homes Bonus is £0.574m more than was assumed. There is further consultation on the future of this funding stream.

81. The Spending Review includes an allocation of Covid-19 funding for local authorities for 2021-22 and this has been allocated as part of the Settlement with Staffordshire receiving £16.2m, to be kept centrally until the financial impact becomes clearer.

82. Social care needs are identified at £17.6m so the additional council tax raised by increasing the threshold will not be sufficient to cover costs. A small inflationary increase on Public Health grant is anticipated and while this will inevitably reduce the Prevent agenda slightly, it should not be significantly affected.

83. The Secretary of State has given his assurance to the leaders of local authorities that if more funding is needed to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic then that would be found. As the Council is having to raise council tax by 0.1% below the limit, there is no headroom if this funding is not forthcoming over a short or longer term.

84. The whole of the Provisional Settlement including the allocation of social care support grant and the distribution of the Covid-19 funding is subject to consultation and amounts will not be confirmed until the final settlement is announced during February.

85. Although a stable platform has been created for the current year based on prudent assumptions, beyond that there is uncertainty and little confidence and with uncertainty, comes risk.

86. The pandemic forces difficult conversations around prioritising. In ordinary times, a strategic plan with sound financial backing would be delivered but in the current circumstances planning is difficult and a need for flexibility and quick reaction is necessary.

87. The new post-Covid world is likely to be significantly different and will be an opportunity to re-shape the County Council. Many businesses are remodelling themselves now. We questioned whether the assumptions on which the budget is

based are visionary enough and will it be fit for purpose for the post-Covid Council but we accept that there is little confidence or certainty to plan beyond one year. Furthermore, some legislative certainty from Government would be necessary - in terms of Devolution and Social Care Green paper for example – long anticipated but not priorities for a Government focussed on the pandemic and Brexit.

88. We asked to what extent Cabinet tests the validity of anticipated pressures – demographic pressure, for example – do they retrospectively check how accurate forecasts were? We are assured that previous years assumptions around spending pressures are challenged and any adjustments – up or down – are highlighted.

Community Impact Assessment – MTFS

89. A high level overarching CIA on the MTFS - a cumulative assessment of impact which identifies key issues and includes plans for mitigation - has recently been updated to consider additional savings proposals, key Covid-19 impacts and reflects the refreshed CIA priorities for the upcoming year.

Implications

90. Resources and Value for Money - Consideration of the MTFS, annual budget and Council Tax, inevitably means that this review focused on the allocation of the County Council's resources. Considering the value for money delivered by services was a central theme of the evidence gathering process. Many of our conclusions and recommendations are focused on ensuring that the County Council is achieving value for money.
91. Equalities and Legalities - Determining priorities is central to the MTFS and budget setting process, and we were conscious in our review that this means some services are identified as being a lower priority than others. Any decision to significantly change or reduce a service based on its priority level will need to be taken into account the impact on various groups (equality impact assessment). There are no specific legal implications to the report.
92. Risk - Our conclusions and recommendations draw attention to some of the key risks to the successful delivery of the MTFS. We considered the relationship between risk management and financial management and asked questions about the main financial risks to the authority and how these might be mitigated during the course of our work.
93. Climate Change - Taking action to reduce the County Council's Carbon Emissions has the potential to have a positive impact on the budget both in terms of avoiding financial penalties from Central Government and in terms of reducing energy costs. This is an issue which the Cabinet must continue to work on.

Acknowledgements

94. We would like to thank the following officers who supported the Working Group:

Rachel Spain
Nick Pountney

Corporate Finance Manager
Scrutiny and Support Manager

Carol Bloxham Scrutiny and Support Officer

The Working Group would like to thank the Chief Executive of New Local, Cabinet Members and officers who participated in the budget interviews.

**County Councillor Colin Greatorex
Chairman of the MTF Working Group
Chairman of the Corporate Review Committee
January 2021**

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List of Appendices/Background Papers

Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021 - 2026

WORK PROGRAMME – January 2021

Corporate Review Committee

The Corporate Review Committee is the Council's principal scrutiny committee. It is responsible for co-ordinating and approving the scrutiny work programmes, overseeing the work of the Select Committees and ensuring coherence of approach to cross cutting policy themes. The committee also has a key role in challenging progress around the Council's ambitions of running the business well.

The Committee also scrutinises those areas of the County Council's activity focused on corporate improvement. Its remit covers:

- Holding the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council to account for achievement of the overall vision of a connected Staffordshire.
- The Council's overall performance and approach to managing performance and Strategic Corporate Planning
- The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy
- The Council's on-going programme of improvement and transformation.
- The Committee is responsible for scrutiny of achievement against the Council's strategic priorities
- The Council as a commissioning organisation including how it uses customer insight to drive improvements in services

We review our work programme regularly to ensure it remains relevant to the challenges facing local communities, the council and its partners.

County Councillor Colin Greatorex
Chairman of the Corporate Review Committee

If you would like to know more about our work programme or how to raise issues for potential inclusion on a work programme then, please get in touch with or Nick Pountney Scrutiny and Support Manager - 01785 276153.

Date of Meeting	Topic	Link to Council's Strategic Priorities	Background/Outcome
4 June 2020 – virtual meeting	COVID 19 – specifically issues on Health (NHS) and finance. Member: Alan White, Mike Sutherland Officers: Simon Whitehouse/Rob Salmon		That the Chairmen of the Select Committees agree which committee would be best placed to scrutinise the Local Outbreak Control Plan
8 June 2020 Reserved for Call-in cancelled			
11 June 2020 – cancelled			
3 July 2020 (Contact: Nick Pountney/Mandy Pattinson – Scrutiny & Support Manager)	Gender and Equality Issues to include: Member: Philip Atkins /Philip White Officer Sarah Getley.		Item proposed by Leader of the Opposition.
	Covid-19 update Member: Leader		
31 July 2020 Reserved for Call-in (Contact: Nick Pountney/Mandy Pattinson – Scrutiny & Support Manager)	Working Group on Members Parental Leave. Member: Philip Atkins /Philip White Officer Sarah Getley		Comments made and included
	Performance Report – Quarter 4 2019/20 and Quarter 1 2020/21 Member: Mike Sutherland Officer: Andrew Donaldson, Rob Salmon		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Information on Government funding received and what it had been spent on be circulate to the Committee for information. b) The Cabinet Member agreed to discuss with the Leader the possibility of a meeting with all the Staffordshire MPs to discuss future funding and the need for additional resources. c) That the results of the working group set up to look at client debt be included in the next quarterly update report.
8 September 2020 (Contact: Nick Pountney/Mandy Pattinson – Scrutiny & Support Manager)	The Local Outbreak Control Plan Member: Alan White Officer: Richard Harling		Requested at 4 June meeting and 31 July. Committee agreed: Members be supplied with information on the location and demographics of the current cases in Staffordshire.
	Work Programme		Information on the Entrust contract was requested.

Date of Meeting	Topic	Link to Council's Strategic Priorities	Background/Outcome
Cancelled 2 October 2020 Reserved for Call-in			
Cancelled 6 October 2020			
Cancelled 9 November 2020 Reserved for Call-in			
17 November 2020 (Contact: Nick Pountney/Mandy Pattinson – Scrutiny & Support Manager)	Performance Report – Quarter 2 2020/21 Member: Mike Sutherland Officer: Andrew Donaldson, Rob Salmon		The following information was requested: i. The number of people on the Adult Safeguarding service waiting list and their expected waiting times and information on any changes to the reablement services and assistive technology. ii. Request information from District and Borough Councils on the financial support being offered to business. iii. An update on the number of families receiving support through the Defra Emergency food Scheme; the amount spent to date; and the strategy to reach those families in the most need. iv. The action plan to address the EHCP backlog. v. Information on the £2m investment (on top of the £5m allocated) for improvements to road drains, gully emptying, roadside grass cutting etc be circulated to all Members of the Council. vi. The 5-year action plan to deliver carbon reductions be circulated to the committee for information. vii. An update on the #Doingourbit Community Fund. c) The results of the Residents Survey and the subsequent recommendations be included in the Committees work programme.
	Covid 19 – verbal update report Member: Alan White Officer: Richard Harling		Outcome- The Leader and Officers were thanked for their report
	Corporate Complaints Annual Report Member: Alan White/Mike Sutherland Officer: Kate Bullivant		That the Customer Feedback and Complaints Service annual report 2019/20 be noted. b) The appointment of the post in Highways to deal with complaints was welcomed. c) It was recognised that some complaints were not being captured due to accessibility of online or automated complaints process. d) That all Members of the Council should receive a copy of the report for information.
	Communities Principles Member: Victoria Wilson Officer: Helen Riley, Andrew Donaldson / Janene Cox		a) The Communities Principle plan was noted. b) A report on b) be included in the work programme.

Date of Meeting	Topic	Link to Council's Strategic Priorities	Background/Outcome
23 November 2pm Hosted by Stoke City Council Teams meeting	Scrutiny of the LEP (Joint meeting with Stoke City Council) at Stoke City Council Members: Philip White Officers: Darryl Eyers/Anthony Hodges		New governance for the LEP have now been approved. Informal Joint Scrutiny with Stoke City Council. County Hosted on 8 January 2019
Cancelled 4 December 2020 Reserved for Call-in			
Cancelled 8 January 2021 Reserved for Call-in			
21 January 2021 (Contact: Nick Pountney– Scrutiny & Support Manager)	Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group - Final Report Officer: Nick Pountney		
	Digital Inclusion (including those with SEND) Member: Mike Sutherland Officer: Andrew Donaldson / Laura Ballinger/Adam Rooney		
	Staffordshire Covid-19 Resident Survey findings Member: Alan White Officer: Andrew Donaldson / Wendy Thompson/Kerry Dove		
5 February 2021 Reserved for Call-in (Contact: Nick Pountney – Scrutiny & Support Manager)			
5 March 2021 Reserved for Call-in (Contact: Nick Pountney– Scrutiny & Support Manager)			
30 March 2021 (Contact: Nick Pountney– Scrutiny & Support Manager)	Performance Report – Quarter 3 2020/21 Member: Mike Sutherland Officer: Andrew Donaldson, Rob Salmon		
6 April 2021 Reserved for Call-in (Contact: Nick Pountney– Scrutiny & Support Manager)			

Date of Meeting	Topic	Link to Council's Strategic Priorities	Background/Outcome
TBC	Equal Opportunities		Raised at 3/7/20 committee – need more equality areas in the work programme. Discussion with Chair and Vice Chairs/officers 6/10/20. Draft paper being prepared, setting out the current position from both a community and workforce perspective. Focus groups to be arranged. Following this a general refresh of Equality Objectives will be carried out. Then report to Corporate Review for scrutiny and to inform the committee of the areas which need priority.
TBC	Governance and control of Arm's length companies/partners. E.g. Nexxus / Entrust / AMEY. Particularly in light of Robin Hood Energy/Nottingham City Council. What is out process, how is performance measured, how are contract changes negotiated, what influence do we have. Member: Philip White Officer: Helen Riley /Darryl Evers/John Tradewell/ Ian Turner		Item discussed with Chair and Vice Chairs. MTFS to look at financial aspects. Report requested for early 2021, possibly January in line with MTFS findings.
TBC	Digital Strategy Member: Mike Sutherland		Digital Strategy requested at 10 January 2020 meeting. Also requested by Prosperous Committee.

Items for Consideration for the Work Programme

Suggested item	Link to the Council's Commissioning Plans	Background	Possible Option
Networks – E.g. Leaders group/CE groups/LGA - how is the information shared?		Discussed at Chairs/Vice Chairs meeting 07/10/20	

Working Group updates

MTFS 2020	Appointment of Members 2020	Membership (appointed 31 July 2020): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charlotte Atkins John Francis Colin Greatorex (Chairman) Ian Parry Jeremy Pert Jeremy Oates 	Observers Mike Sutherland Alan White
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martyn Tittley • Susan Woodward 	
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Suggested Working Group item	Link to the Council's Commissioning Plans	Background	Possible Option

Membership - County Councillors	Calendar of Committee Meetings
Colin Greatorex (Chairman)	4 May 2020 (virtual)
Conor Wileman (Vice Chairman)	4 June 2020 (virtual)
	8 June 2020 - cancelled reserved for call in
	11 June 2020 - cancelled
Charlotte Atkins	3 July 2020 (virtual)
Mike Davies	31 July 2020 (virtual)
Helen Fisher	8 September 2020 (virtual)
John Francis	2 October 2020 - cancelled reserved for call-in
Jeremy Oates	6 October 2020 at 2pm – cancelled
Ian Parry	9 November 2020 reserved for call-in
Jeremy Pert	17 November 2020 (virtual)
Bernard Peters	4 December 2020 – cancelled reserved for call-in
Natasha Pullen	8 January 2021 – cancelled reserved for call-in
Stephen Sweeney	21 January 2021 (virtual)
Susan Woodward (Opposition Vice Chairman)	5 February 2021 reserved for call-in
	5 March 2021at 2pm reserved for call-in
	30 March 2021
	6 April 2021 reserved for call-in