

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 22 July 2021

Attendance

Jak Abrahams	Derrick Huckfield	Jonathan Price
Arshad Afsar	Philip Hudson	David Smith
Charlotte Atkins	Graham Hutton	Paul Snape
Gill Burnett	Thomas Jay	Mike Sutherland
Tina Clements	Julia Jessel	Mark Sutton
Richard Cox	Jason Jones	Stephen Sweeney
Mike Davies	Peter Kruskonjic	Simon Tagg
Mark Deaville	Ian Lawson	Samantha Thompson
Janet Eagland	Tom Loughbrough-Rudd	Ross Ward
Ann Edgeller	Johnny McMahon	Jill Waring
Keith Flunder	Paul Northcott	Alan White
Richard Ford	Jeremy Oates	Mike Wilcox
Colin Greatorex	Gillian Pardesi	Bernard Williams
Philippa Haden	Ian Parry	David Williams
Gill Heath	Kath Perry, MBE	Victoria Wilson
Phil Hewitt	Jeremy Pert	Mark Winnington
Jill Hood	Bernard Peters	Mike Worthington

Apologies for absence: Philip Atkins, OBE, John Francis, Syed Hussain, Robert Pritchard, James Salisbury, Janice Silvester-Hall, Bob Spencer, Carolyn Trowbridge, Philip White, Conor Wileman and Ian Wilkes.

PART ONE

18. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 May 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 20 May 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

19. Chairman's Correspondence

Staffordshire residents recognised in Queen's Birthday Honours

The Chairman extended the Council's congratulations to the following Staffordshire residents who had been honoured in her Majesty the Queen's Birthday Honours:

- CBE for Amanda Penelope Sunderland, of Burton, formerly Chief Nurse of Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, for services to Nursing;
- OBE for Margaret Isobel Bernadette Kincade, of Stafford, tax specialist for HM Revenue & Customs, for services to the taxation of the oil industry;
- OBE for Jayne Lowe, of Caverswall, Managing Director and Education Advisor, Bright Green Learning, for services to Education;
- MBE for Dr John Alexander, of Loggerheads, Consultant in paediatric intensive care at UHNM NHS Trust, for services to critically ill children and young people;

- MBE for Corrine Boden, of Stoke-on-Trent, for services to the community in Stoke-on-Trent, particularly during Covid-19;
- MBE for Barry Michael Bond, of Wombourne, Chair of Governors at Green Park School in Wolverhampton, for services to Education;
- MBE for Julia Catherine Bridgewater, of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Group Chief Operating Officer at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, for services to the NHS, particularly during Covid-19;
- MBE for Zoe Adelle Clark-Coates, of Tamworth, Founder of the Mariposa Trust, for services to the baby loss community and the improvement of bereavement care;
- MBE for Neil Anthony Dawson, of Stoke-on-Trent, for services to the community in Stoke-on-Trent;
- MBE for Aida Haughton, of Stoke-on-Trent, Housing Support Administrator at YMCA North Staffordshire, for services to 'Remembering Srebrenica';
- MBE for Eric Horabin, of Tamworth, Member of, and Poppy Appeal Collector for, the Tamworth Branch of the Royal British Legion, for services to the Ex-Services community;
- MBE for Karl Humphries, of Newcastle-under-Lyme, of Get Hooked on Fishing, for services to Education;
- MBE for Tracey Maria Johnson, of Stoke-on-Trent, formerly HR director at Leek United Building Society, for services to Financial Services during Covid-19;
- MBE for Josepha (Josie) Hannah Morris, of Stoke-on-Trent, Managing Director of Woolcool, for services to manufacturing and the Environment;
- MBE for Ian Andrew Noons, of Yarnfield, Custodial Manager at HM YOI Drake Hall, for services to HM Prison and Probation Service;
- MBE for Alan Pearson, of Hednesford, Headteacher of New Invention Junior School, Walsall, for services to Education;
- MBE for Siobhan Reilly, of Bishops Offley, Regional Chief Nurse, Midlands and East NHS England & NHS Improvement, for services to Nursing and the Covid-19 response;
- MBE for Rebecca Rollason, of Cheslyn Hay, Resourcing Manager for the vaccines taskforce at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, for services to the Government during the Covid-19 response;
- MBE for Clifford John Thornton Stott, of Keele, Professor of Social Psychology at Keele University, for services to Crowd Psychology and the Covid-19 response;
- BEM for former County Councillor Lee Bates, of Tamworth, for services to the community in Tamworth and Covid-19 response projects;
- BEM for Councillor Paul Brindley, of Tamworth, for services to the community in Tamworth and Covid-19 response projects;
- BEM for Hannah Findlay, of Biddulph, front line food retail worker for the Co-operative Group, for services to the food supply chain;
- BEM for Janet Hewes, of Gnosall, for services to the community in Gnosall.

Tokyo Olympics

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended his best wishes to all the Staffordshire competitors taking part in the Tokyo Olympics, which were to get

underway on 23 July, and at the Paralympics next month. He informed the Council that first to go for Gold at the weekend would be swimming superstar Adam Peaty, who would be the first British swimmer to defend his Olympic title. The GB team would also include Burton boxer Frazer Clarke, Stone Canoeist Adam Burgess and Porthill Triple Jumper Ben Williams.

20. Statement of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council.

Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Cllr Smith enquired as to the take-up rates of the Covid vaccine amongst the 18 - 29 age group and also the number of people in Staffordshire currently in hospital with the virus. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that 40% of those in the 18 – 29 age group in Staffordshire had received two doses of the vaccine and 60% had received one dose. With regard to hospital admissions, Cllr McMahon indicated that rates in Staffordshire were much lower than seen previously.

Cllr Pert referred to the announcement in the Queen's Birthday Honours List that the NHS had been awarded the George Cross in recognition of 73 years of dedicated service, including for the courageous efforts of healthcare workers across the country battling the Covid-19 pandemic. He asked whether the Leader of the Council would, on behalf of residents of the County, write to the leaders of the NHS in Staffordshire to congratulate them on the Award? In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that he would be happy for the Council to do so and that he would ask Cllr Jessel and Cllr McMahon to draft an appropriate letter.

Cllr Afsar and Cllr Greatorex referred to the hesitancy shown by some communities and age groups in getting vaccinated against Covid. Cllr Afsar added that local councils had a vital role to play in tackling this issue and asked the Leader of the Council whether he agreed that community involvement was critical in encouraging people to come forward and get vaccinated at the earliest opportunity? In response, Cllr Alan White stated that he agreed with Cllr Afsar about the importance of community involvement and, by way of example, he referred to the leadership shown by Cllr Hussain in supporting his local community in Burton throughout the pandemic.

Cllr Pardesi enquired whether the award of the George Cross would help NHS workers' pay their bills? In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that he was sure that the last thing on NHS workers minds during the pandemic was "pay and rations" but doing the right thing for their fellow human beings.

Cllr Hutton extended his congratulations to the Council and its staff for the contribution they had made during the Covid pandemic as they had played a major role in helping to reduce hospital admissions. Cllr Jessel also paid tribute to Cllr McMahon for the leadership he had shown. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that the Council's senior leadership recognised the valuable contribution made by the Council's staff during the pandemic and had decided to recognise their efforts by awarding them a day

off on their birthday and also sending to every employee a “thank you” card containing wild flower seeds.

Cllr Jessel also referred to the need for parents to ensure that their children were vaccinated against other illnesses such as measles, mumps and rubella as take-up rates had fallen during the Covid pandemic.

Cllr Flunder and Cllr Deaville referred to the rapid response by the NHS and volunteers to the recent Covid outbreak in Leek and they also praised the on-going contributions made by Cllr McMahon and Dr Richard Harling.

Cllr Hood enquired as to whether it would be possible to have a vaccination centre in Stone as the town had a population of around 20,000 people and the nearest centre was eight miles away. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that he had asked Cllr Jessel and Cllr McMahon to write to the NHS to enquire whether it would be possible to have a vaccination centre located in Stone.

In concluding, Cllr Alan White indicated that Covid had not gone away and he encouraged all Staffordshire residents to get vaccinated.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Cllr Winnington referred to the economic impact of the Covid pandemic on some groups, particularly women and young people; issues with supply chain for a number of materials businesses required; and also how inflation was impacting on local businesses. He praised the work of the County Council for the measures it had implemented to support the local economy such as through loans, apprenticeships and training. He also asked Cabinet to lobby Members of Parliament to work with businesses to find out what support they required.

Cllr Afsar referred to the job vacancy figures which increased by 9% in Staffordshire between April and May, equivalent to 2,100 more job vacancies, and enquired as to in which sectors those vacancies occurred. He also asked for an update on the Council’s apprenticeships scheme. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that he did not have the information to hand and that he would therefore ask Cllr Philip White to respond in writing. Cllr Huckfield added that the apprenticeships scheme was a great initiative, an excellent opportunity for young people to learn new skills, and a means to tackle the skills gap.

Cllr Hudson and Cllr Deaville stated that they welcomed the support that the Government and the County Council had given, and continued to give, to the hospitality sector during the Covid pandemic. Cllr Hudson added that he would encourage Staffordshire residents to support local businesses.

Cllr Sutherland referred to the growing level of confidence by some businesses such as JCB (who had recently announced that they had a full order book) and the new Designer Outlet Centre in Cannock, (the McArthurGlen Group’s 7th designer outlet in the UK). Cllr Northcott also referred to the success of the new Skills Hub in Newcastle-under-Lyme which was working closely with local businesses.

Executive Responses for All Party Working Groups

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Cllr Tagg stated that he was pleased that the Cabinet had accepted, and were acting upon, the recommendations of the two All Party Working Groups (APWGs) and added that he would be presenting the final reports and Executive Responses of the Aspiration, Future Economy and Enterprise APWG to the meeting of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 July.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to whether there were proposals to establish any further APWGs and, if so, would Members be consulted on their terms of reference. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that, going forward, the “forward look” work of the APWGs would be undertaken by the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Cllr Flunder extended his thanks to those Members, officers and organisations who had participated in the work of the Communities and Isolation APWG.

Final Financial Outturn 2020/21

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to, bearing in mind the vital role played by Public Health during the pandemic, whether the Council had any plans to increase the allocation in its budget to support the provision of public health services. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that additional funding would be allocated to support the provision of sexual health and drug and alcohol services in the County.

Cllr Greatorex and Cllr Sutherland commended the performance of the Council and its staff in achieving a saving of £1.924m on the 2020/21 budget despite the additional financial pressures due to Covid. In response, Cllr Parry paid tribute to the leadership shown by Cllr Sutherland during the time he served on the Cabinet as the Cabinet Member for Finance. He also spoke about the speed with which the Council had adapted to new ways of working during the pandemic including the move to “digital” whilst ensuring that vital services continued to be delivered.

National Bus Strategy – Enhanced Partnership

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Cllr Edgeller expressed her thanks to the Chaserider Bus Company in responding to local concerns by expanding its services to the Baswich and Wildwood areas of Stafford.

Cllr Cox and Cllr Charlotte Atkins indicated that they welcomed the “Bus Back Better” strategy and hoped it would tackle the transport issues faced by rural communities in particular. Cllr Atkins added that she hoped that the Council would take this opportunity to work in partnership with the bus operators across the County to find innovative solutions to the various issues which needed to be tackled.

Cllr Smith stated that the Council needed to take action to encourage bus operators to reduce pollution by requiring their drivers to turn off engines when their buses were

stationary. He also referred to the difficult balance to be struck between the need for the Council take action to ensure that rural areas were not left without access to public transport whilst, at the same time, having to take difficult decisions on which services should be subsidised given the cost and the low level of patronage. Cllr Smith added that the Council should work with Parish Councils and local communities to find innovative solutions to the problems. In response, Cllr Heath referred to initiatives in her area financed through the Rural Mobility Fund.

Cllr Pardesi stated that more funding was required to support bus services which, in turn, needed to be more frequent/convenient and cheaper in order to increase passenger usage and therefore economic viability.

Cllr Parry indicated that the Strategy was aimed predominantly at urban areas and that, in rural areas, solutions were more difficult to find. He highlighted the need for innovation and that any proposals must be affordable. Cllr Northcott added that innovations could include the use of smaller vehicles, improvements to evening services and the provision of more information for passengers.

Cllr Peters referred to the pollution from buses and added that the Strategy provided an opportunity for bus operators to become “greener” by modernising their fleets, replacing older vehicles with new, less polluting, ones.

Cllr David Williams spoke about the impact of the Covid pandemic on bus operators including the reduced level of service patronage. He also referred to the vicious circle of reduced patronage leading to the withdrawal of services which, in turn, lead to further reductions in patronage. He added that the public should be encouraged to use local bus services as using those services was the only way to ensure that they remained viable. He also indicated that it was for the bus companies to come up with the solutions to the issues being faced but that the County Council would be willing to work with them to find those solutions.

Covid-19

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins expressed the view that although the link between infections and deaths had been weakened by the vaccination programme, it had not been broken and it was therefore vital that everyone should get vaccinated at the earliest opportunity and also continue to take precautions.

Cllr Price paid tribute to teachers and support staff for their hard work during the pandemic in helping pupils to continue with their education and by keeping them safe whilst in school.

Superfast Staffordshire

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Cllr Winnington referred to the success of the countywide broadband partnership which had enabled nearly every household and business in Staffordshire to connect to superfast broadband speeds. He expressed his thanks to all those involved in the roll-out of the project.

Cllr Pardesi enquired as to how many households in the County did not have any access to broadband. In response, Cllr Tagg indicated that he would provide Cllr Pardesi with some information on digital exclusion but it should also be borne in mind that some people preferred to use their smartphone data allowance rather than subscribe to a broadband service.

Cllr Alan White paid tribute to Cllr Winnington for his hard work in leading on the Superfast Staffordshire project.

Euro 2020

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

A number of Members paid tribute to the England Team for their strong performance during Euro 2020 and also expressed their disappointment and sadness at the racist comments made against some members of the Team and the need for those individuals responsible to be held accountable for their actions. Cllr Jessel also referred to the excellent facilities available at St George's Park in East Staffordshire; and Cllr Hood and Cllr Charlotte Atkins praised Gareth Southgate and Marcus Rashford as excellent role models in our society.

In response to a question from Cllr Huckfield, Cllr Alan White confirmed that he was appalled at the racist comments on social media following England's defeat in the finals of the Euros and added that he was proud of the performance of the England Team.

Walley's Quarry

Cllr Huckfield referred to the odours being emitted from Walley's Quarry; the impact on the health of local residents, both in the short term and longer term; the inactivity of the Environment Agency (EA) to address the issue; and the need for all Members of the Council to lobby the EA to take action. In response, Cllr Tagg indicated that Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council were taking action locally and had recently resolved to serve an abatement notice on the operator of the site.

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

21. Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2020-21

Cllr Sutton moved consideration of the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2020-21.

Cllr Edgeller, Cllr Hood and Cllr Price extended their thanks to Cllr Sutton, his fellow members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the officers who supported them, for their excellent work. Cllr Price added the "Children's Voice" was now part of the Council's SEND Strategy.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins commented on the low level of attendance at Panel meetings by some District/Borough Council representatives. In response, Cllr Sutton indicated that the Panel worked hard to ensure that there was good and fair representation across the

whole of the County and where difficulties were encountered, he spoke to the Leaders of the Councils concerned.

Cllr Pardesi referred to the statement in the Report that “looked after young people generally experience poor mental health and asked for access to mental health support in a timely manner” and enquired as to what time frame constituted “a timely manner”? In response, Cllr Edgeller indicated that a lot of work was being undertaken to address mental health issues amongst looked after children. Cllr Sutton added that he would share with all new Members of the Council information on Mental Health Pathways.

Cllr Sutton indicated that there were currently around 1,200 young people in the Council’s care and he reminded all Members of the responsibilities as Corporate Parents. He extended his thanks to Members of the Panel, both past and present, for the valuable contribution they had made and he also welcomed new members of the Panel.

RESOLVED – That the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2020-21 be received.

22. Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund 2020/21 - Report and next steps

The Council were informed that the Covid-19 Support Fund saw £2500 allocated to each County Councillor to invest in projects which supported communities through the pandemic. Councillors were able to use as much or as little of this £2500 as they wanted to support projects which needed it, or to work together with other councillors and jointly support bigger projects.

Funding was available initially for two purposes:

- Projects about providing support to the community re the coronavirus. Group’s activity had to relate to:
 - supporting people who were self-isolating or in quarantine
 - helping the community to be resilient against wider impacts of Covid-19
 - developing community networks to do either of the above.
- Providing funding to existing community groups who were facing a reduced income due to the impact of Covid-19 (for example around paying overheads while facing reduced incomes).

From July 2020 onwards, county councillors were equipped with a second tranche of the funding because of the ongoing emergency situation, with an additional £2000 to allocate per Member. The two fund uses above remained, but a third was added in recognition of the fact that some community organisations were beginning to open back up:

- Projects which related to community recovery, sustaining new social action, restarting activity which had been paused, or adapting provision for the ‘new normal’.

The combined Covid-19 Support and Recovery Fund closed on 30 October 2020, with a deadline for funds being used by 28 February 2021. The Fund was a successful element of Staffordshire's response to the pandemic. As part of a much bigger picture of other funders, agencies and volunteers working together, over £230k was distributed to help community organisations look after those who needed it most.

Several members gave examples as to how the funding had been used in their respective areas. Cllr Greatorex paid tribute to Cllr Wilson for the report and also to Pete Barker of the Council's Member and Democratic Services Team for the advice and support he had given to Members in allocating the funding.

Cllr Wilson informed Members that, going forward, the member fund for 2021/22 financial year, called the 2021 Community Fund, was aimed at helping the voluntary and community sector think about 'where next'. Now that the Country was starting to adapt to a new normal, the 2021 Community Fund was about supporting groups to think about their future offer, how they would fundraise, and how they would return to ideas which they were going to pursue before the pandemic began.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

23. Recommendations to the Council

(a) (i) Members' Allowances Scheme - Independent Remuneration Panel Report

Members were informed that the County Council was required to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to provide advice and recommendations to the Council on its Members' Allowances Scheme. Any decisions on the nature and level of allowances were a matter for the Full Council, but the Council must have regard to any recommendations submitted by the Independent Remuneration Panel before establishing or amending the Members' Allowances Scheme. The Panel met each year to consider the recommendations to be made to the Council in respect of the level and nature of the forthcoming year's allowances.

The Independent Remuneration Panel's report of July 2021 noted and supported the changes to the Special Responsibility Allowances following the 2021 County Council Elections and Annual Council Meeting. In the report, the Panel also proposed to fully review the Members' Allowance Scheme, the Basic Allowance and the expenses paid to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the County Council this year and report their findings back to the County Council in due course.

RESOLVED – That (a) the Independent Remuneration Panel July 2021 report be received.

(b) That the Council accept the Panel's proposal to fully review the Members' Allowance Scheme, the Basic Allowance and the expenses paid to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the County Council this year and report their findings back to the County Council in due course.

(a) (ii) Independent Remuneration Panel – Appointment

Members were informed that the Independent Remuneration Panel currently had four Members who were appointed by the County Council. The minimum number of people permitted to sit on the Independent Remuneration Panel was three and a maximum of five. Members of the Panel usually served a term of four years, but this may be extended where it was expedient to do so.

Christina Robotham was first appointed as an Independent Remuneration Panel member in October 2017. As the other Members of the Panel were still relatively new, it was proposed that Christina Robotham's term of office be extended for a further period of five months in order to retain her expertise as the Panel's Chairman for the duration of the financial year.

RESOLVED – (a) That the period of office for Christina Robotham as a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel be extended for a further period to 31 March 2022.

(b) That, if required, the Audit and Standards Committee be requested to carry out a recruitment exercise for IRP members in 2022.

(b) Changes to the Constitution including the review of changes as approved by Annual Council on 20 May 2021 as reviewed by the Audit and Standards Committee on 13 July 2021

Members were informed that, at the Annual Council meeting on 20 May 2021, the Council considered a number of proposed amendments to the Constitution which were required to reflect changes to decision making structures. Included in the report were several changes to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers as had been requested by Senior Leadership Team members to reflect day to day operational requirements and the Council's involvement in wider projects (e.g. HS2). In supporting the changes to the Constitution, the Leader of the Council indicated his wish for those changes to be reviewed by the Audit and Standards Committee in order to provide reassurance that they were required and in keeping with the Council's 'member-led' philosophy.

The changes were reviewed at the meeting of the Audit and Standards Committee on the 13 July 2021. Members of the Committee had no issue with any of the changes presented to Council in May 2021. Members noted, however, that since the Annual Council meeting, three decisions (as detailed in Table 1 to the report) had been reviewed and deemed to be no longer required. In addition, there were two further changes to the constitution proposed for the Council's consideration. These two proposed changes (as detailed in Table 2 to the report) were reviewed and endorsed by the Audit and Standards Committee.

RESOLVED – (a) That the changes to the Constitution detailed in Table 1 within the report and which were approved at the Annual Council meeting in May 2021 and reviewed by the Audit and Standards Committee, be agreed.

(b) That the further changes, as detailed in Table 2 to the report, be approved.

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

Cllr Edgeller referred to people's use of social media to complain about judgements made by the Commissioner whilst, at the same time, there were very few who took up the opportunity to attend meetings of the Panel. She urged the Commissioner to publicise more widely details of when Panel meetings were to take place and to encourage more public participation. Cllr Hudson also spoke about the need to improve the links between Members of the Council and their respective Local Policing Units so as to improve communication and he undertook to raise this matter with the Commissioner.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

25. Questions

Cllr Pardesi asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community members live in small confined spaces next to the Walley Quarry Landfill site. What steps are being taken to ensure their smaller living situations are not more adversely compounded than those of house dwellers? What is being done to make sure that our GRT community is being fully consulted and updated in order that it is able to contribute to the current process and plans for this site?

Reply

The Environment Agency is responsible for regulating the Walleys Quarry Landfill site and has held three virtual public engagement events, they also provide weekly updates via the environment Agencies 'Citizen Space'.

Staffordshire County Council continues to work with other public agencies as part of a Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) convened by the Local Resilience Forum, to co-ordinate activities to try and mitigate the risks to the health of all local people.

The SCG held a further a community engagement event on Tuesday 6 July to which all members of the community were invited. Representatives from the Environment Agency, Public Health England, the NHS, and officers from Staffordshire County Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council were part of this, with the event chaired by the deputy SCG Chair, Rob Barber Deputy Chief Fire Officer from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee are also considering the important matters further next week (26 July), relating to Walleys Quarry Landfill Site with a focus on health implications for all residents.

All local people can make their views known through complaints to the Environment Agency, representations to Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council or their Elected Members. They are also encouraged to report odour and symptoms to the County Council's 'smell and symptom tracker' to help further inform the SCGs approach.

Supplementary Question

How many members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community living adjacent to the Walley's Quarry site have access to the internet?

Reply

We do not have that information.

Cllr Pardesi asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

In light of the pitiful Covid Education catch-up plan for England students, how can this government claim to be concerned about failing thousands of students and be serious about breaking the link between deprivation and poor outcomes in schools?

Reply

The Department for Education announced a number of different funding streams and packages to support education recovery and children and young people's wellbeing. In June 2020 mainstream schools were allocated £80 for each pupil from reception to year 11 inclusive and special schools were allocated £240 per pupils. Schools were required to use this funding for specific activities to support their pupils' education recovery.

Secondary schools have been provided the opportunity to hold a summer school with a blend of academic education and enrichment activities. The funding to run a summer school equates to £597 per 2-week place (or £1791 per place for pupils in special schools and alternative provision).

To support some of our youngest children attending school, access to the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme, is being made available for free, during the academic year 2021/2022.

In 2021/2022 schools will also receive additional recovery funding, building on the Pupil Premium, to further support pupils who need it most. The average primary school will receive around £6,000 extra, and the average secondary school around £22,000 extra. As this funding is based on the number of disadvantaged pupils, schools with more disadvantaged pupils will receive larger allocations but will have flexibility to direct funding based on their assessment of needs.

Schools have been provided with a range of tutoring approaches: both continuing the work with the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and offering a new complementary school-led approach, allowing schools to take on local tutors or use existing staff to supplement those employed through the existing NTP.

The DfE has provide access to a range of support to improve mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges. This includes guidance on whole school and college approaches to mental health and wellbeing, funding for senior mental health leads training and funded support through the wellbeing for education recovery programme. This has been received very positively in Staffordshire.

The 16-19 Tuition Fund has been extended for a further two years for 16-19 year olds, into the 2023/24 academic year. The fund will continue to provide targeted small group tuition in English, mathematics and other subjects where learning has been disrupted because of the pandemic and is available to all 16-19 providers.

Nationally Defra initially worked with local authorities on allocating funding for Food and Emergency supplies (allocating over £600,000) and latterly the Department for Work and Pensions have worked to deliver the COVID Winter and Locality Fund (allocating over £4 million) this has enabled the county council to provide vouchers for food and emergency items throughout the pandemic.

These schemes are due to finish in October and will be replaced by the Holiday Activities and Food Programme. This programme delivers food and activities to children who are living in low income families (Free School Meals eligible.) We are working hard to prepare for the summer schemes and will also deliver this in Easter and Christmas to ensure that this much needed support is available for families.

Supplementary Question

Why did the Education Recovery Commission resign over this issue?

Reply

We work particularly hard at supporting our school children and I would be happy to meet with you to discuss any concerns you may have about the situation in Staffordshire.

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

Question

As we come out of a difficult period, a community group in Tamworth is organising a Pride event. Could the Cabinet Member arrange for the installation of a pedestrian crossing in Tamworth to be painted with a Rainbow in order to show our support for this community and celebrate Pride?

Reply

The County Council is committed to the promotion of inclusivity within all of our services and welcomes the suggestion to celebrate diversity within Staffordshire communities.

Should the scheme be accepted, careful consideration will need to be given to ensuring the road safety features provided by the crossing are not diminished.

As the Local County Councillor, I hope you will be able to work with your local community to seek agreement for such a scheme and to find appropriate funding both for the implementation and the required continued maintenance.

Supplementary Question

Will the Cabinet Member commit to ensuring that such groups are able to achieve their celebrations and that, where they impact on the highway network, the Council will work with them and manage their aspirations in a simple, clear and safe way which does not feel that the Authority is producing hurdles or hoops for them to jump through?

Reply

Yes, I'd be happy to work with such groups to ensure that their events can be held in a safe manner.

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

Question

Most of the roadside grass verges in Leek are looking very unkempt while many trees badly need pruning. Is this part of a County Council plan to maximise flowering plant diversity, benefiting insects, pollinators and other wildlife?

If so:

- (a) When will the roadside verges be cut and trees pruned, how many times a year, and in which months? Will the grass cuttings be collected to reduce the development of thick hatch?
- (b) Why has a strip not been cut at the edge of verges to keep the verges tidy, preserve good road visibility and ensure pavements and footpaths are accessible?
- (c) What work has been carried out to ensure that road sight lines and junctions are not obscured by vegetation?
- (d) Why are there no signs on the verges, making it clear that wilder verges are part of a thought out management plan rather than, as widely believed by the general public, just cost-cutting? Why has there been little engagement with communities to share this County plan and communicate its objectives?

- (e) Where can Staffordshire residents read the reasoning for the County Council plan for roadside grass verges and trees?
- (f) Will the council consider facilitating a meeting of relevant stakeholders and experts to review the overall plan in advance of next year's growing season, ensure it is meeting best practice, and then draw up a simple means of communicating the results to residents?

Reply

The County Council's approach to highway grass cutting, hedge cutting and tree maintenance is detailed on our webpages: [Weeds, grass, trees and hedges - Staffordshire County Council](#). This includes information about the routine activities that take place every growing season to control the growth of highway vegetation in order to maintain visibility, reduce damage to the road structure and, most importantly, improve road user safety.

This summer, so far, has seen ideal weather conditions for vegetation growth and, in addition to routine activities, reactive works will take place to address specific concerns regarding the safety of road users, e.g. excessive tree growth blocking a footway. These concerns can be reported online and our routine Highway Inspections will also ensure any necessary works are prioritised.

Environmental maintenance service levels were last reviewed in February 2020 when engagement took place with all local councils specifically regarding changes to grass cutting programmes. A number of these local councils deliver urban grass cutting on our behalf to meet our safety specifications but often enhance this level of service to maintain and improve the appearance of the public realm in their area.

The Council also supports those communities who wish to maintain local wildflower areas to promote biodiversity and local identity. A number of schemes are in operation but the views of the community and their contribution to the necessary maintenance of such wildflower areas is paramount.

Supplementary Question

Will you work with Cllr Tagg to ensure we get better biodiversity whilst, at the same time, working with local communities proactively to ensure they get a greater understanding about what the objectives of the Council are?

Reply

I can assure you that we are being proactive in that Cllr Tagg and I are putting together a policy to address this, but we have to remember that when we do plant trees close to highways there is a cost and also on-going costs for maintenance and safety inspections.

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

Question

What is the expected delivery time for traffic calming measures in Morley Street, Leek as a feasibility study has been completed and sufficient DHP monies allocated to pay for the scheme?

Reply

A feasibility scheme for traffic calming on Morley Street was funded by the local member through their Divisional Highway Programme (DHP) to address local concerns about vehicle speeds. The feasibility study, completed in February 2021, established that traffic calming measures could be physically accommodated and provided an initial cost estimate for the scheme. The next phase is to undertake a full consultation with the local community within the next few months on the proposed arrangements, and this work is currently being programmed against all other Member DHP priorities. Upon completion of the consultation the final scheme design/delivery costs will be confirmed so that the Member may consider funding through their DHP; however, it is anticipated that more than one year's allocation will be required.

Supplementary Question

I have allocated my current and future DHP monies to this project so that it is fully funded, and I am increasingly concerned about the lack of progress in bringing it to fruition. I would ask the Cabinet Member to secure a timetable to ensure that this project can get underway as soon as possible.

Reply

Unfortunately, after speaking to officers, I am informed that the project is not fully funded as it is not possible for you to allocate anticipated future DHP monies to the scheme. However, I would be happy to discuss this matter with you after the meeting to see how it can be taken forward.

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

Question

As a new County Councillor, since becoming elected I have been inundated with requests to visit Potholes and general conditions of the Roads around Burton Town Division which are in a very poor state of repair.

Having visited many roads around my division I am constantly finding that there are large areas of the division that have had previous work done by third party contractors such as Gas works, Virgin Media etc and the finish is of a poor standard further leading to pot holes and road sinkage which in turn requires SCC to repair at their own cost.

Could the Cabinet Member confirm what are the arrangements for checking the quality of work by these contractors and by whom, do the works carry any

guarantees, what are the percentages of work completed and are there and KPI's kept of such quality checks?

Finally, would the Cabinet Member for Highways at a mutually convenient date and time accompany me for a short drive through my division to see and experience my concerns?

Reply

Utility companies have legal powers to install and maintain their apparatus in the highway. This legislation and a series of national codes of practice and specifications exist to ensure that their work is safe and fit for purpose. Utility companies, as professional private organisations are entirely responsible for the quality of their work and must ensure that their work meets the national specifications.

All utility reinstatements have a guarantee period of two years during which any faults must be remedied at their cost. The same legislation and national codes of practice permit us to inspect a utility company's work.

There are over 30,000 holes dug in Staffordshire roads each year by utilities. The national code of practice for inspections sets out a process whereby the County Council visually inspects a random 30% sample of utility works:

10% during the works

10% immediately after works have completed, and

10% at the end of the two-year guarantee period

The utility companies pay us to undertake these inspections. If more than 10% of inspected sites fail to comply then the utility company responsible is usually required to put in place an improvement plan to try to prevent further problems occurring. We can also undertake additional random inspections on poor performing utility companies to ensure compliance with their improvement plan. There is currently one utility company with an improvement plan in Staffordshire.

We undertake extra inspections as part of normal highway duties when we receive reports from members of the public. These additional inspections are undertaken at any stage of the reinstatement's life, even after the two-year guarantee period.

Inspections undertaken are mainly visual inspections and are done to check that the correct cones and signs are being used or that the surface of the reinstatement has not sunk, cracked or is not visually defective. We also operate a small program of both random and targeted coring to determine compliance of the layers not visible on the surface.

The Cabinet Member for Highways would be pleased to meet with yourself and the Network Inspection team at a mutually convenient date and time to look at local issues with utility reinstatements.

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

Question

While I totally support projects that are designed to counter Climate Change, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the misuse of Electric Scooters across the County. I have had many communications from residents who have seen younger people riding these scooters in an unsafe way. Could I ask the Cabinet Member what controls are in place to register those scooters that are under the County supported scheme? I would also like to know if driving licences are being checked?

Reply

As the Member will be aware the Council is one of several Local Transport Authorities taking part in the national pilot study on the use of E-scooters on the public highway. The Department for Transport believe that E-scooters may be a potential low emission solution to replace short distance car journeys. It is important to remember that national travel data shows that 2/3 of all car journeys are less than 5 miles in length.

The pilot E-scooter schemes in the Stafford and Newcastle have generally had a positive response from users and take up is increasing. As you would expect there are several controls to encourage safe usage and we are working closely with the operators and the police on this issue. The controls include:

- Fixed Bay Parking Model - Across both trials areas we operate a fixed parking bay model, this means E-scooters can only (without incurring a fine and potential account suspension) be parked and left in designated bays that is agreed by the operators and the council.
- Speed Cap - Each E-scooter on the trial is capped at 12mph, the legal limit set by the DfT is 15mph.
- Age Restrictions - E-scooters cannot be rented by anyone under the age of 16, they must upload a picture of their driving license and a "selfie".
- Area of operation - In conjunction with the operator we determine the operational area. Outside of this area, E-scooters stop.
- No-Go Zones - There are some areas in the operational area, such as pedestrianised areas, where using a E-scooter is not appropriate, E-scooters come to a stop in these areas.
- Slow Zones - Areas where it's appropriate to use a E-scooter – but there are high number of pedestrian and vehicle movements scooters slow to 6.5mph in these areas.
- Curfew - The E-scooters in both trial areas have a curfew of 10pm, this means no new rides can start after this time.

- **Banning Users** - A small number of users have been banned for unsafe riding or antisocial behaviour, this is done by the operators when incidents are reported to them. Using the built in GPS tracking system, a rider will usually receive a warning and then, if appropriate a ban. We are working with all stakeholders including the police to improve rider education and reduce misuse.

In Staffordshire, you must be 18 years or older to use the rental E-scooters and as mentioned above, driving licences are checked prior to rental although it is recognised that like any system this is open to potential abuse. The operators are constantly working on ways to improve rider education in this area to minimise this happening.

The Council is in close contact with the Department of Transport which is collecting data from all the E-scooter pilot areas prior to deciding on whether to legalize E-scooters for use across England on the public highway. The control of private E-scooters, operating outside the control of rental schemes such as the two in Staffordshire, will clearly be a matter for full debate and careful consideration.

Supplementary Question

Who enforces the regulations and does the County Council have any liability with regard to the inappropriate use of the e-scooters operated under the pilot study?

Reply

Many of the e-scooters in use on our highways are privately owned and are therefore being used unlawfully and I understand that the Government are to bring forward a White Paper on this matter. With regard to the use of e-scooters under the pilot study, liability rests with the operators of the pilot.

Cllr Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

In her video on the Burton library consultation, respected Councillor Victoria Wilson, the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture, says that moving the library into the market hall would "create increased footfall into the town centre to grow and attract more businesses". On what statistics is this based? According to data from the Freedom of Information Act, the present market hall had a footfall of 249,083 in 2018/19. (the last full year not affected by Covid restrictions.) The Burton library had 276,156 visitors that year. Given that BOTH locations are in Burton town centre (they are less than 250 meters/ 275 yards away), HOW can shutting the market hall and relocating the library "create increased footfall into the town centre"? Without a doubt, it reduces footfall into the town centre by 249,083! Can I ask Cllr Wilson, what statistics did she depend on to make this assertion, or is it a mistake that may severely mislead people being consulted?

Reply

The Council are aware of the Market Hall footfall. At the point of submitting the Town Investment Plan to Government an uplift in footfall of 40% was proposed. The increase in footfall achieved in Lichfield was much higher than this (97%) but the projections were moderated down to take account of the footfall which would be lost because of the market hall closure.

The figures quoted in Cllr Hussain's question are just for the Burton library service itself. Cllr Hussain will be aware that the proposals are broader than moving just the library service. The consolidation of all County staff into the town centre and the footfall from the Registry Office will be moved on top of the library footfall.

In addition to the increase in footfall on the Market Place, the proposals which would follow on from this Council's move away from the existing library site will open up exciting new regeneration opportunities for redevelopment of the waterfront (known as project D – High Street Linkages). This project forms another of the seven inter-related projects contained within the Burton Town Improvement Plan submitted to Government. East Staffordshire Borough Council will lead a public consultation process on project D later in the summer.

Cllr Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

According to Councillor Wilson, the relocation of the library to the Market Hall is "very essential for the rehabilitation and preservation of the market hall, which is such an ancient structure." The county council plans to invest £8.3 million for this purpose. HOWEVER, according to freedom of information statistics, just £345,000 is required to maintain the ancient market hall over the next ten years (£1.4 million was spent on it in 2014). According to Councillor Wilson, relocating the library would save taxpayers £84,000 per year in maintenance and operating expenses. That sounds admirable until one considers that it would take the council 100 years to spend the £8.3 million that it plans to spend on the library relocation. HOW ON EARTH CAN THIS BE CONSIDERED VALUE FOR MONEY? Would this council consider such a proposal if it was going to be funded by the council rather than the government? Is this the wisest use of the town's windfall funds?

Reply

The £8.3 million estimated project cost caters for much more than relocating the library. Investment in the fabric of the Market Hall will go way beyond the recommendations contained within the latest condition survey (£343,000 in September 2017) to preserve this locally important building for decades to come. High cost interventions include replacement of the existing roof, new heating system, new electrical systems along with construction of new internal and external meeting rooms and extension of the existing balcony to create modern office accommodation.

Calculations on whether this provides value for money for Staffordshire tax payers should relate to this Council's £1.3 million investment, which at a saving of £87,000 per annum when compared against the "do nothing" scenario, will be recouped in just

under 15 years. This investment should also be offset against increasing footfall in the town centre and furthering the regeneration ambitions of the town.

The Town Fund is one of the Government's national funding interventions aimed at "levelling up" the country and is an acknowledgement that Burton needs additional funding for projects of this nature. Ultimately, it is for East Staffordshire Borough Council, the Burton Town Board and Government to determine whether they believe this investment provides value for money within the constraints of the funding criteria. At a contribution rate of around 15% of the overall project costs, this Council believes the project delivers value for money for the Staffordshire tax payer.

26. Petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

Chairman