

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 9 December 2021

Attendance

Arshad Afsar	Philip Hudson	Bob Spencer
Charlotte Atkins	Syed Hussain	Mike Sutherland
Philip Atkins, OBE	Graham Hutton	Mark Sutton
Gill Burnett	Thomas Jay	Stephen Sweeney
Tina Clements	Julia Jessel	Samantha Thompson
Richard Cox	Jason Jones	Carolyn Trowbridge
Mike Davies	Peter Kruskonjic	Ross Ward
Mark Deaville	Johnny McMahon	Alan White
Janet Eagland	Paul Northcott	Philip White
Ann Edgeller	Jeremy Oates	Mike Wilcox
Keith Flunder	Ian Parry	Conor Wileman
Richard Ford	Kath Perry, MBE	Bernard Williams
Colin Greatorex	Jeremy Pert	David Williams
Philippa Haden	Jonathan Price	Victoria Wilson
Gill Heath	Janice Silvester-Hall	Mark Winnington
Phil Hewitt	David Smith	Mike Worthington
Derrick Huckfield	Paul Snape (Chairman)	

Apologies for absence: Jak Abrahams, John Francis, Jill Hood, Ian Lawson, Tom Loughbrough-Rudd, Gillian Pardesi, Robert Pritchard, Simon Tagg, Jill Waring and Ian Wilkes.

PART ONE

37. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

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

Member	Minute Nos.	Interest	Reason
Mark Deaville	40	Personal	Director of Nexxus
Julia Jessel	40	Personal	Trustee of John Taylor Free School
Mark Winnington	40	Personal	Non-Executive Director of Nexxus
Mark Winnington	40	Personal	Grower of Energy Crops

38. Confirmation of the minutes

RESOLVED – (a) That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 14 October 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

(b) That the minutes of the Special meeting of the County Council held on 14 October 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

39. Chairman's Correspondence

Honorary Alderman Terence Alec Dix

The Chairman informed the Council of the death, on 16 November 2021, of Honorary Alderman Terence Alec Dix. Mr Dix represented the Watling (Tamworth) County Electoral Division on the County Council from 1981 to 2009. He was Leader of the Council from 1996 to 2007 and Chairman of the County Council from 2007 to 2009.

Mr Dix served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Cultural and Recreational Services Group Committee, Development Services Group Committee, Planning Committee, Education Group Committee, Policy and Resources Group Committee, Social Services Group Committee, Fire and Emergency Planning Committee, Enterprise and Economic Committee and the Highways Committee (on which he served as Chairman).

Mr Dix was appointed as an Honorary Alderman in 2009.

Former County Councillor Kenneth Gordon Gant.

The Council were also informed of the recent death of former County Councillor Kenneth Gordon Gant. Mr Gant represented the Perrycrofts (Tamworth) County Electoral Division on the County Council between 1985 and 1993.

Mr Gant served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Fire and Public Protection Committee, Social Services Committee, Highways Committee and the Libraries, Arts and Archives Committee.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins, Cllr Philip Atkins, Cllr Clements, Cllr Oates and Cllr Alan White paid tribute to Mr Dix and Mr Gant for the contributions they had made to the work of the Council, following which Members stood and observed a one-minute silence in their memory.

40. Statement of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council. In moving consideration of his Statement, the Leader made the following statement:

Arthur Labinjo-Hughes

"I know every member of this council will have been shocked and appalled when reading media coverage of the trial of the father and step-mother of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes last week. A truly terrible, awful case.

This tragic case is a solemn reminder of the county council's vital role, working alongside our partners to keep the most vulnerable young people in Staffordshire safe from harm and neglect. Our social workers do an outstanding job every day, often in hugely challenging circumstances.

We will be looking very closely at the outcomes of the inquiries into Arthur's death, to make sure that we are doing everything possible in Staffordshire to protect and support the children who need our care."

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to what was being done in Staffordshire to ensure that the Council's more experienced Social Workers shared their experience about failings with newer Social Workers so that the service could learn from them. She also enquired as to what the Council was doing to track "ghost" children who had disappeared from teachers' line of site due to the Covid pandemic.

Cllr Philip Atkins indicated that there would be lessons to be learnt for all Councils from the serious case review. He, together with Cllr Philip White, also referred to the improvements to Children's Services in Staffordshire in recent years through its transformation programme and, for example, the establishment of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. Mr White paid tribute to Cllr Sutton and to the Council's Director for Children and Families for driving forward the improvements. Mr Atkins added that Children's Services in Staffordshire were currently rated as "good" and he reminded Members of their important role as Corporate Parents for those children in the Council's care.

Cllr Parry stated that Ofsted ratings alone did not keep children safe and it was professionalism of Social Workers that played a major factor. He, together with Cllr Hudson, spoke about the difficulty in recruiting Social Workers both locally and nationally and the need to ensure that all of society shared in the role of keeping children safe. Cllr Hudson also referred to the particular shortage in male Social Workers and their importance as role models

Cllr Edgeller spoke about past failings in the care system and the need for the Council to do everything in its power to keep children safe. Cllr Philip White and Cllr Hudson referred to the important role residents could play in reporting cases where they suspected abuse may be taking place.

Cllr Sutton thanked Members for their comments and informed the Council of some of the measures being taken by the authority to improve its approach to safeguarding, including the implementation of the restorative practice model, the recruitment of 31 more frontline social workers, seven SEND workers, twelve new “front door” social workers to undertake initial assessments, three additional practitioners to review cases and support frontline staff and 24 extra family support workers. He also referred to improvements in the electronic case management system and the robust systems which were in place for the safeguarding of the county’s children.

Cllr Sutton also explained how, during lockdown, Social Workers worked closely with teachers and other partner agencies to ensure the safety of children and he added that visits still took place to the homes of vulnerable children.

Cllr Alan White concluded the debate by extending the Council’s thanks to the county’s social workers for their excellent work and commitment.

Adult Learning Disability 2022 Community Offer: Update on Learning Disability Residential Services Directly Provided by Staffordshire County Council

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

In response to a comment from Cllr Greatorex regarding his support for the proposals to extend and refurbish the Hawthorn House lower building to accommodate up to 15 residents, Cllr Jessel stated that she was pleased to reaffirm the Council’s commitment in the services it provided to vulnerable people. She added that the Council had worked hard to keep the residents of Hawthorn House together in their social group.

Climate Change Annual Report and Climate Action Plan Action Plan 2

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Cllr Hussain referred to emissions from central heating gas boilers in residential properties and the significant cost implications for households in replacing them with other, more eco-friendly, sources of heating. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that the Council would pursue opportunities for Government funding to support homeowners, particularly those suffering fuel poverty.

Cllr Hussain also referred to the various actions the Council could take to help tackle climate change through, for example, planting trees and replacing older streetlighting with new LED ones. He also referred the need for the world’s most carbon emitting countries, such as China, India, USA and Iran, to play their part in tackling climate change.

Cllr Clements suggested that the Council needed to look in house as to what additional actions it could take to reduce emissions such as replacing some of its vehicle with electric ones and, when buying goods and services, to choose suppliers who had a “green agenda”.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to how the Council would monitor progress against the action plan and ensure that its response to climate change was joined up across all service areas.

Cllr Winnington referred to the Government proposal to plant more trees and the need for the public sector to work together to reach targets. Cllr Smith commended the Annual Report and Action Plan and referred to the need for the Council, and its elected Members, to use their influence to encourage others to reduce their emissions.

Cllr Price commended the work of Cllr Jessel and Cllr Tagg in developing the Annual Report and Action Plan and stated that climate change was everyone’s responsibility. He, together with Cllr Deaville, also referred to the work of the Sustainability Board which was made up of relevant portfolio holders from the County Council and the eight District/Borough Councils in Staffordshire.

Cllr Philip Atkins referred to the need for behavioural change, for example, by choosing clothes made from natural fibres over synthetic materials. He also spoke about the role to be played by the agricultural sector in helping to tackle climate change and the need to tackle the emissions from the organisations who were the larger polluters in the County.

Formal Report of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Cllr Charlotte Atkins as to the lessons to be learnt from the findings contained in the Ombudsman’s report, Cllr Price explained that the Council was reviewing approximately 50 other historical cases around transport applications to ensure that the decisions were taken correctly.

Impact of Covid-19 on SCC Communities, Economy and Organisation and Recovery Progress – Update October 2021 and Way Forward (Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Cllr Hussain extended his thanks to frontline staff, residents and the Council for its dedication in tackling the Covid pandemic. He also spoke about the personal losses faced by families across the County.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins referred to the impact of the pandemic on people’s mental health and she also highlighted an issue in Leek where the County

Council and Clinical Commissioning Groups had stopped funding a service. She added that the clients felt abandoned and asked what could be done to bolster community projects. In response, Cllr White undertook to look into the matter.

Nexus Trading Services Limited – Annual Report 2020/21

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Cllr Deaville and Cllr Winnington highlighted some of the successes of Nexus including the 60% growth in its business and an annual turnover of £6.238m. They, together with Cllr Price, paid tribute to the staff employed by the company, together with the volunteers, for their hard work and commitment.

Supplementary Capital Programme for Schools 2021/2022

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Cllr Smith concerning schools becoming more environmentally sustainable, Cllr Price indicated that the capital programme contained provision to address climate change and sustainability issues within schools. He added that there was a new all through school being built in Rugeley which would be a carbon neutral school.

Branston Locks Primary - Proposed 2FE and Associated S106 Contributions (Wave School)

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Cllr Jessel and Cllr Philip White, in welcoming the proposals for the new school at Branston Locks, referred to the need for other essential infrastructure in the area such as access to primary health care.

Staffordshire Bus Strategy - Bus Service Improvement Plan

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Cllr Smith asked the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport if he could raise with bus companies operating in Staffordshire the issue of drivers leaving engines running whilst their vehicles were stationary, leading to unnecessary pollution. In response, Cllr David Williams confirmed that this issue had been raised with bus operators

In welcoming the Bus Improvement Plan, Cllr Charlotte Atkins also referred to the need for the Council to work with bus operators to ensure that all buses carrying schoolchildren were fitted with seatbelts. In response, Cllr David Williams confirmed that it was a requirement that all school busses were fitted with seatbelts.

Cllr Flunder informed the Council of the work of the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee in helping to inform the development of the Plan and added that he would welcome Members views and suggestions.

Household Support Fund

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Cllr Sutton provided an update on how the Household Support Fund had been utilised in Staffordshire including over 25,000 vouchers being issued to parents of children entitled to receive free school meals. In response to questions from Cllr Hussain regarding how much money the Council was spending in tackling “holiday hunger” and what more could be done to help those in poverty, Cllr Alan White indicated that he would respond in writing regarding spending on holiday hunger and that the Council was working hard to improve the quality of jobs, and thus higher wages, available across the County.

Half Yearly Treasury Management Report for the Period Ended 30 September 2021

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Cllr Parry gave Members a brief overview of the operation of the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy and explained how cash was being used to fund short term monetary requirements instead of borrowing, adding that this policy was saving taxpayers money.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Cllr Hudson referred to the difficulties currently being faced by Elks Biscuits in Uttoxeter and the risk of staff redundancies if the company was to cease trading. He added that, if there were redundancies at the company, those affected may need the assistance of the Council’s Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service.

Cllr Hewitt expressed his delight that Cannock Chase District Council had been successful in their Levelling Up Fund bid and had been awarded £20M to support key regeneration schemes in their town centre. He extended an invitation to the Leader and Deputy Leader to visit Cannock. Cllr Philip White responded by indicating that he, together with the Leader of the Council, would be pleased to accept the invitation. He also referred to the McArthur Glen Designer Outlook development in Cannock and the need to ensure that a balance was struck so as to ensure that town centres remained vibrant.

COVID-19

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Cllr McMahon provided the Council with an update on the current Covid situation both nationally and locally. He informed Members that the number of new cases of Covid in Staffordshire remained high but slightly below the England average. Case rates were highest in school age children, and hospital admissions remained stable. He added that the emergence of the Omicron variant of the virus was of concern because it showed significant mutations and there was the possibility that it might escape the immunity conferred either by prior infection or vaccination. Further data was required before it was possible to be confident about the level of the threat posed by the Omicron variant. With regard to vaccination rates in Staffordshire, 76.9% of care home residents had been fully vaccinated, 74% of those who were housebound had received their booster, and 72% of those over the age of 50 had received their booster. Cllr McMahon concluded that Covid was likely to be with us for some time and that the Council was maintaining the defences it had put in place.

Cllr Huckfield referred to hospital admissions and indicated that four out of five of those in hospital with Covid had not been vaccinated and he urged everyone to get vaccinated as soon as possible, not only to protect themselves, but also those with whom they came into contact.

Winter Bonus for Home Care Staff

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Cllr Philip Atkins spoke about the need for everyone who was eligible to be vaccinated against Covid to get vaccinated so as to reduce the risk to those working in hospitals and the Home Care Sector. He also referred to the poor take-up of the vaccine in some parts of the County.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins welcomed the package of recruitment and retention incentives for staff in the Home Care Sector this winter but indicated that this was unlikely to resolve the longer-term issue of staff shortages. She also enquired as to the vacancy levels in the sector and how much each member of staff would receive as part of the package of incentives. In response, Cllr Jessel indicated that, by way of an example, the incentives were being paid to those providers taking-on the more complex care packages; and it could also be used to pay childcare costs for those carers who took-on additional hours. She added that she agreed that the incentives would not tackle the longer-term recruitment and retention issues in the sector, however, if the Council were to receive a three-year financial settlement from the Government, this would improve its ability to plan for the longer-term including the funding paid to the Home Care sector. Cllr Jessel also referred to the need to improve the status of those working in the profession which would, in-turn, make the jobs more attractive.

Winter Operations

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

Cllr David Williams paid tribute to the teams undertaking the winter operations on the County's roads, often in difficult and challenging weather conditions. The Chairman added that he, together with the Vice-Chairman, were to visit some of the Highway Depots to personally extend the Council's thanks to the teams. Cllr Alan White also extended his thanks to the teams.

SWAR

(Paragraph 16 of the Statement)

Cllr Price, Cllr Winnington and Cllr Pert praised the Council staff and partner organisations on the construction of the Stafford Western Access Route (SWAR) which had opened recently. Cllr Philip Atkins added that the scheme was an excellent example as to how the Council could deliver large projects locally by working with partners such as the Local Enterprise Partnership.

In response to a question from Cllr Smith concerning safety audits on new roads, Cllr David Williams confirmed that once a new highway had been in use for a short while checks were undertaken to ensure it met the expected safety standards.

Cllr Pert added that the project was part of the vision to regenerate the High Street in Stafford. Cllr Alan White added that there were a number of other major highway projects in the pipeline including along the A50 – A500 corridor (North Midlands Manufacturing Corridor) and on the A38.

2021 Community Fund

(Paragraph 17 of the Statement)

Cllr Flunder extended his thanks to Officers and to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture for extending the deadline for the submission of applications under the Community Fund. He added that the Fund had made a big difference to many local communities.

In response to a question from Cllr Charlotte Atkins, Cllr Wilson and Cllr Alan White confirmed that there was a rigorous process in place to ensure that spending under the Fund was audited and that this included collecting "evidence of spend" to show that the grant had been used for the purpose for which it had been given.

2021

(Paragraph 18 of the Statement)

Cllr Hussain wished his fellow Members a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Cllr Alan White thanked Cllr Hussain and added that 2021 had been a difficult year and that he hoped that Members would be able to take some well-earned time off over the Christmas period.

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

41. Recommendations to the Council

(a) Financial Regulations

The Council considered a recommendation of the Audit and Standards Committee that the County Council approves revisions to the Council's Financial Regulations for inclusion within the Constitution. Members noted that a detailed review had been undertaken to reflect the changes that had occurred since the regulations were last reviewed in 2018 following the introduction of the My Finance and MyHR financial systems, together with minor amendments reflecting changes to job titles of relevant officers. The main areas of change were as follows:

- Financial Regulation B – updated to include specific reference to the requirement to obtain Cabinet approval in all instances where the County Council wished to undertake the formal role of Accountable Body for a partnership and that the partnership would follow SCC financial policies and practices as standard practice.
- Financial Regulation E – updated to include arrangements for the receipt and payment of invoices electronically. Order approval limits had been amended in line with the revised procurement regulations. In addition, the purchase card guidance had been strengthened to state that the purchase of food and drink for staff social events was prohibited.
- Financial Regulation F had been updated to include reference to the use of direct debits as the preferred payment method for those services that were provided frequently.
- Financial Regulation H – the section on the disposal of supplies had been updated to include the need to speak to a procurement advisor regarding the best way forward including any potential sale process.

RESOLVED – That the recommendation from the Audit & Standards Committee that the County Council approves the revised Financial Regulations for inclusion within the Constitution be agreed.

(b) Change to the Constitution - Amendments to the Council's Procurement Regulations

The Council considered a report of the Director for Corporate Services proposing changes to the Council's Procurement Regulations. Members noted that the Regulations were reviewed periodically, minor changes were made by the Monitoring Officer, but more fundamental changes were made by full Council following recommendation by the Audit and Standards Committee. The main areas of change were as follows:

- To adjust the Officer approval levels for contracts to facilitate greater control and ownership amongst Band B and C Officers.
- To ensure that the spend value of a particular contract 'variation' triggered the appropriate Officer approval rather than the spend of the source contract being varied.
- To adjust the Officer approval levels for Exception Forms to facilitate greater control and ownership amongst Band B Officers.
- To introduce minor amendments to the Procurement Regulations.

In response to a question from Cllr Charlotte Atkins in relation to sustainable procurement, Cllr Deaville confirmed that the Council endeavoured to procure locally by encouraging local suppliers to submit tenders for goods and services. He added that he did not have information to hand on the percentage of goods and services which were procured locally but that he would make enquiries and respond to Cllr Atkins in writing.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations contained in the report be agreed.

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

Cllr Hussain extended his congratulations to Mr Noble on his appointment as Chief Constable for Staffordshire. He also extended his thanks to Mr Adams, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, for his recent visit to his Division.

Cllr Deaville extended his congratulations to Mr Barber on his appointment as Chief Fire Officer and also paid tribute to Becky Bryant for the contribution she had made during her time as Chief Fire Officer.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

43. Questions

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

Question

Thanks to the Future High Street Fund, Staffordshire County Council, South Staffordshire College and Tamworth Borough Council, Tamworth town centre is about to undergo a huge re-development. This near £100M re-development will offer residents of my division an improved shopping, retail and visitor experience.

Can I take this opportunity to ask the Leader of the Council to recommit publicly, on the record, the council's support for this exciting project and

its desire to help create a vibrant town centre in Tamworth for future generations to come?

Reply

Can I thank Cllr Pritchard for talking the time to ask such an important question and one that is so relevant to the vibrancy of all our towns and city centre going forward?

Tamworth town centre is one of a number of places that is receiving unprecedented levels of support from central government. This includes Town Deals in Newcastle, Kidsgrove and Burton that represents over £60M of government investment. We are also seeing investment through the Future High Streets fund in Stafford and again Newcastle totalling nearly £50M.

I am delighted to put on record our support for not only Tamworth, but all our Boroughs and Districts who are working so hard to regenerate their town centres. This is reflected in the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills having as one of his key priorities over the period of this administration, to support the regeneration of our town centres.

These centres are an important part of our Staffordshire community and working with our partners it is vital we find solutions to their regeneration. Whilst the investment from government is welcomed, we cannot underestimate the task that we all face, and each must play a part. We are already investing significant sums in our urban areas and considering how we use our existing assets in the most positive way to help our partners, but to also allow us to continue to deliver our mainstream activity. In addition, I would suggest that we consider the involvement, support and assistance of our respective members and officers on local delivery boards to add further capacity and to aid the sharing of local knowledge. I look forward to further detailed proposals coming forward for this Cabinet to consider.

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

Question

During the pandemic Tamworth community stepped up and showed its heart and spirit.

One group that delivered fantastic support for the community was Community Together CIC. This work has continued with the group currently on working to bring a visit by Santa Clause to local children who are in economic hardship.

Would the Leader/Cabinet Member join me in congratulating the organisation on this fantastic work?

Reply

We are immensely proud of the work that the voluntary sector has delivered during the pandemic.

We would like to congratulate Community Together CIC for some fantastic initiatives, which included a visit to Father Christmas. Watching the way this community group has helped children in the area, who have experienced real hardship during this time, has been humbling.

On behalf of Staffordshire County Council, I offer my sincere thanks for the work of the volunteers and look forward to seeing more great initiatives in the future.

Supplementary Question

Would you agree that the Voluntary Sector is an essential partner, particularly in early intervention, and that local government should do everything in its power to support them, rather than putting blockers in the way which has been the case in the past?

Reply

Yes, I whole heartedly agree. We cannot underestimate their role in our local communities.

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

Question

Every week-day morning my residents are stuck in excessively long traffic jams that form on the A5, when residents are traveling from the A5 eastbound on to the M42 Junction 10 island. Sometimes these queues have been a mile in length.

Would the relevant Cabinet Member meet with me and my other colleagues onsite to discuss how the council can lobby the Highways Agency to improve the traffic flow at peak times?

Reply

I would be happy to meet with you, by way of an update of what we are already doing.

The A5, M42 and Junction 10 is part of England's Trunk Road Network and is managed by National Highways.

Recent communications between Council officers and National Highways officials have confirmed that the signal-controlled junction at this location is managed by software to maximise traffic flows whilst managing queuing traffic on all approaches.

National Highways have indicated that they are aware of peak time queue lengths on the eastbound A5 but have stated that any queue length reduction will depend on increasing junction capacity which is currently restricted due to the geometry of the southern bridge deck.

Council officers are represented on the A5 Tamworth to Hinckley working group which is lead by National Highways who are looking at potential highway improvements along this route. The capacity issues of junction 10 have been raised and will continue to be raised at this forum, although it should be noted that sustainable travel is also discussed as a potential solution to unrestricted growth in vehicular traffic.

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

Question

After a recent taxi drivers forum meeting it became apparent that the very people trying to transport our residents from a-b are not informed when we put in road closures or diversions. Please can you advise how this can be rectified so that they can be forewarned about these highways issues as time is money to these drivers?

Reply

Road maintenance, utility operations, sporting and community events are just some of the reasons why road closures, diversions or other traffic restrictions appear on local roads.

Details of all such formally arranged events are publicly available online at [One.Network](#).

As well as being able to view details of all events across the whole of the UK's local road network, [One.Network](#), also allows local Transport Operators and individual members of the public to sign-up to receive direct alerts about events on particular roads or areas of interest.

It's a simple 4-step process. But our Highway Network Management team have also very helpfull produced an illustrated guide, which I'll arrange to be circulated to all Members.

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

Question

Will the plan set out in the Government's White Paper resolve the County Council's social care challenges? If not, what more needs to be done?

Reply

On 01 December the Government published the White Paper ***People At The Heart Of Care: adult social care reform***. The White Paper builds on the Care Act 2014 and sets out a vision that many elderly and disabled people will welcome, with its three objectives to ensure that:

1. People have choice, control, and support to live independent lives.
2. People can access outstanding quality and tailored care and support.
3. People find adult social care fair and accessible.

There remain significant questions about how the ambitions in the White Paper will be funded. It includes a promise of £3.6bn over the three years 2022/23 to 2025/26 to fund the Care Cap, more generous capital thresholds and equalise the prices paid by local authorities and private individuals. However, it is not clear that this will lead to a net increase of funding for the adult social care sector. A further £1bn is earmarked for various national schemes to support the workforce, housing and technology, which might amount to around £5m annually for Staffordshire.

The big challenges in adult social care are rising demand and the ability of the providers to pay competitive wages. The Council has a range of initiatives underway to try and address these. We will need support from HM Government, with significant additional funding, if the aspirations of the White Paper are to be realised.

Supplementary Question

Providers can't pay competitive wages if the County Council won't pay them more. How much additional funding do we need from Central Government so that we can pay more fees to ensure that these staff can be paid an appropriate level of pay so as to ensure their retention in the sector?

Reply

As the written response has said, there is a promise of an additional £3.6bn over three years to fund the Care Cap but we don't know yet how much of this will be allocated to Staffordshire. It is not just about wages, it is also about how we deliver these services and help people to remain physically and mentally fit for as long as they can to enable them to retain their independence.

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

Question

Can the Cabinet Member tell me the percentage of children attending school? How does this compare with previous years?

Reply

The latest Staffordshire attendance data as of 26 November 2021 (from September 2021) is 94.6%. The latest unvalidated national attendance information we have is for week 42 (19 – 23 October) which was 86%. The attendance data for Staffordshire for the autumn term 2020 was 95.8% compared with a West Midlands rate of 95.1% and a national rate of 95.3%.

The Staffordshire attendance figure for the whole academic year 2019/2020 was 92.5% and in 2020/2021 was 93.8%. We are waiting for the national data to be published for these periods.

Supplementary Question

The figures in the reply are reassuring. Would the Cabinet Member join with me in thanking schools and children's social workers for the work that they do in ensuring that children are safe?

Reply

Absolutely.

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

Question

In light of the announcement of the Government's Drug Strategy, what is the evidence that confiscation of passports and driving licences will prove to be a deterrent? Who is this particular strategy aimed at when most of the vulnerable and in need of support do not even possess passports and driving licences?

Reply

The Government on 06 December 2021 published *From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives*. This sets out a plan to combat illegal drugs by breaking drug supply chains, delivering a world class treatment and recovery system, and achieving a shift in the demand for recreational drugs.

The Government's intention is to publish a White Paper in 2022 which will consider increased sanctions for recreational drug users such as curfews, removal of a passport or driving licence, and fines. The evidence base and likely impact of these measures is not available at this time.

44. Petitions

Request for 20 mph Speed Limit in Leek Town Centre

Cllr Charlotte Atkins presented a petition from local residents requesting a 20 mph Speed Limit in Leek Town Centre.

Chairman