

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 21 July 2022

Attendance:

- Jak Abrahams
- Arshad Afsar
- Charlotte Atkins
- Philip Atkins, OBE
- Tina Clements
- Richard Cox
- Mike Davies
- Janet Eagland
- Ann Edgeller
- Keith Flunder
- Richard Ford
- Colin Greatorex
- Philippa Haden
- Gill Heath
- Phil Hewitt
- Jill Hood
- Derrick Huckfield
- Graham Hutton
- Julia Jessel
- Jason Jones
- Peter Kruskonjic
- Ian Lawson
- Tom Loughbrough-Rudd
- Paul Northcott
- Jeremy Oates
- Gillian Pardesi
- Ian Parry
- Kath Perry, MBE
- Jeremy Pert
- Jonathan Price
- Robert Pritchard
- James Salisbury
- Janice Silvester-Hall
- David Smith
- Paul Snape
- Bob Spencer
- Mike Sutherland
- Mark Sutton
- Stephen Sweeney
- Simon Tagg
- Samantha Thompson
- Carolyn Trowbridge
- Ross Ward

- Jill Waring
- Alan White
- Philip White
- Mike Wilcox
- Conor Wileman
- Ian Wilkes
- Bernard Williams
- David Williams
- Victoria Wilson
- Mark Winnington
- Mike Worthington

Apologies for absence:

- Gill Burnett
- Mark Deaville
- John Francis
- Philip Hudson
- Syed Hussain
- Thomas Jay
- Bernard Peters

Part One

16. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

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

Philip White

Minute nos. – 19

Interest – personal

Reason – member of Newcastle under Lyme Town Deal Board

17. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 19 May 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 19 May 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

18. Chairman's Correspondence

Her Majesty The Queen's Birthday Honours

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended congratulations to Catherine Mann, the Council's interim Assistant Director for Culture, Rural and Safer Communities, in being awarded a MBE for her national work

promoting a literate, kinder society, as well as being the head of the county's library service for more than a decade.

The Chairman also informed the Council that other Staffordshire recipients of Honours included:

- OBE for Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal MBE DL, of Brocton, Regional Prevent Coordinator at the Department for Education, for services to social cohesion;
- OBE for Dr David Lawson Jacques, of Stafford, for services to garden history and conservation;
- MBE for Pamela Bostock, of Tamworth, Consultant Occupational Therapist at Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust for services to adults with progressive neurological conditions;
- MBE for Glenn Gerald Parkes, of Stoke-on-Trent, for service to the homeless and rough sleepers of Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent;
- MBE for Douglas Robertson Wright DL, of Wood Lane, near Aldridge, for services to the economy and to charity in the West Midlands;
- BEM for Sheila Anne Cooper, of Cheadle, a First Aid trainer and instructor in the Cheadle division of St John Ambulance in Staffordshire;
- BEM for Daniel Mark Kinsey, of Wombourne, Chair of Wombourne Parish Council, for services to the community of Wombourne, particularly during Covid-19.

Honorary Alderman Derek Davis OBE

The Chairman informed the Council of the death, on the evening of Monday 11 July 2022, of former County Councillor Derek Davis. Mr Davis represented the Chadsmoor (Cannock Chase) County Electoral Division on the County Council from 1985 to 2021

Mr Davis served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Pensions Committee, Pensions Panel, Audit and Standards Committee, Staffordshire Health Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Review Committee and the Assets and Budget Scrutiny Committee.

Mr Davis was awarded an OBE in the 2010 for his services to local government and particularly his work as Chairman of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority from 2001 to 2009.

He was also appointed as an Honorary Alderman upon his retirement from the County Council in 2021.

Councillors Sutherland, Charlotte Atkins and Philip Atkins paid tribute to Mr Davis following which Members stood and observed a one minute silence in his memory.

19. 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.

Household Support Fund

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Councillor Sutton informed Members that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had announced an extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF) Grant which would be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England. Staffordshire was to receive around £5.5m which would be split across three areas of activity to support those most in need this Summer.

Staffordshire Better Care Fund 2021-23

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

The Leader of the Council indicated that he wished to amend the paragraph to clarify that the Health and Well-being Board was required to approve the 2022/23 Staffordshire BCF Plan.

In response to a question from Councillor Charlotte Atkins concerning the need to more effectively promote the Disabled Facilities Grant, Councillor Jessel indicated that there was variations in spend across the District/Borough Councils, with some Councils underspending. She added that the Leader of the Council was taking this matter forward through the Leaders' Board. Councillor Alan White added that Leaders of the Councils across Staffordshire were doing their utmost to get the money out to where it was needed.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Councillor Philip White outlined how the Council's Staffordshire jobs brokerage scheme "Staffordshire Jobs and Careers", Apprenticeship 500 programme and Ignite initiative were helping people to gain skills and find employment. He also encouraged Members to promote the initiatives.

In response to questions from Councillor Pardesi concerning the "vetting" of businesses taking on apprentices and how outcomes were monitored; how many people participating in the ignite initiative went on to set up their own business; and ensuring that graduates also had opportunities, Councillor Alan White indicated that he did not have the information to hand and would therefore ask the Deputy Leader and the Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills to respond to her in writing.

Final Financial Outturn Report 2021/22

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Charlotte Atkins concerning the cost of social care reform and how the Council would meet these costs, Councillor Parry indicated that the Cabinet, at its meeting on 20 July 2022, received details of the latest revenue forecast outturn for Quarter 1 and noted that inflationary pressures were forecast to be in the region of £50-£70m in the current and future years and that the Council continued to monitor the situation carefully. He added that additional funding had been made available to address inflationary pressures and that, like many local authorities, the Council still faced financial challenges, but continued to keep its finances in as strong a position as possible. Councillor Parry and Councillor Alan White also indicated that the Council would continue to lobby Central Government in respect of the National Insurance Levy.

Corporate Delivery Plan 2022/23

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Councillor Greatorex spoke about the importance of the Corporate Plan in ensuring that the Council could monitor performance against its targets and remained on course.

Members noted that the Corporate Plan outlined the key priorities across the four directorates and Councillors Sutton, Jessel, Price, and Parry spoke about the priorities for their respective portfolio areas. They also encouraged all Members to read the Corporate Plan.

In response to comments by Councillor Pardesi concerning ambulance waiting times and low income families “not knowing where their next was coming from”, Councillor Alan White suggested that she speaks to Councillor Pert in respect of the work his Overview and Scrutiny Committee was doing with the West Midlands Ambulance Service and also to Councillor Sutton about the Household Support Fund and the Holiday, Activities and Food programme.

Councillor Alan White also expressed his thanks to staff for the calm and level-headed way in which they continued to deliver services across the county.

Digital Connectivity Strategy in Staffordshire

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Councillors Winnington, Heath and Philip Atkins spoke about the importance of the Council’s vision for the county to achieve 100% gigabit connectivity access by 2030, particularly for those living and working in rural areas.

Councillor Heath also raised the issue of poor mobile phone connectivity in rural areas.

Councillor Smith also raised the issue of social isolation, particularly through people working from home, and its impact on wellbeing and mental health, and suggested that this matter be discussed at the Leaders' Board. Councillor Greatorex spoke about how digital connectivity could play a positive role in reducing isolation where those persons living alone were able to get on-line and talk to friends and family. He also referred to the need to offer training to people on the use of technology to ensure that they were not "left behind".

Councillor Tagg thanked Members for their comments and indicated that the Council was on course to deliver the strategy which would include the roll-out of 5G which would address mobile phone connectivity in rural areas.

Newcastle Enterprise Centre Extension Scheme

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Councillors Tagg, Sutherland and Huckfield welcomed the proposed extension to Newcastle Enterprise Centre at Knutton and referred to the positive impact it would have on the area. Councillor Philip White added that the extension to the Centre was being funded through the Newcastle Town Deal and also by the County Council.

Mobilisation of Staffordshire's Household Waste Recycling Centres

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Councillor Huckfield indicated that he welcomed the Council's decision to bring the county's Household Waste Recycling Centres back in-house. He also spoke about the importance of recycling as part of the efforts to tackle climate change.

In response to a question from Councillor Hood concerning traders being turned away from the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Stone because of capacity issues and what could be done to help local traders, Councillor Tagg indicated that the Council was working with the District and Borough Councils to address cross-boundary issues. Councillor Alan White added that officers were working on a new policy to deal with cross-boundary issues and this would be submitted to the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn.

Staffordshire Sustainability Board – Vision and Council Commitments

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Councillor Wileman expressed his support for the formation of the Staffordshire Sustainability Board and enquired as to why there were no

external organisations such as the NHS or business community representation on the Board and when would the "Vision and council commitments" document be reviewed. In response, Councillor Tagg indicated that the Board was in its infancy and the issue around external partners could be examined once the Board had been "up and running" for a while.

Councillor Smith indicated that the "Vision and council commitments" needed to go further to include self-sustaining services for the county's communities.

Staffordshire Leaders Board

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Councillor Loughborough-Rudd welcomed the establishment of the Staffordshire Leader's Board in June and the benefits it would bring through the county council and the district and borough councils working together more closely to deliver priorities and benefits for all residents and businesses in the county. He also expressed the view that the current two-tier system of local government in the county was the right system for Staffordshire.

Ofsted Focused Inspection

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Councillor Sutton informed Members that the findings of the Ofsted Focused Inspection in respect of the Council's support for vulnerable children were generally positive and that the areas identified where improvements needed to be made were being addressed. He added that he had requested the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine the progress being made in dealing with these issues and he also paid tribute to the hard work and dedication of the Council's social care teams.

Holiday, Activities and Food (HAF) programme

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Councillor Pardesi enquired as to whether, partly as a result of the increases in the cost of living, the number of children who needed the Holiday, Activities and Food (HAF) programme was increasing and whether the funding available for the programme was keeping up with this increasing need. She also enquired about what support was available for secondary school children. In response, Councillor Sutton indicated that the HAF was available to all those in receipt of free school meals irrespective of age.

Councillor Hood expressed concern that some low income families could not access the programme as they fell short of meeting the criteria due to not being in receipt of Benefits. She also added that these families often could not access the summer play schemes as they could not afford the cost of the activities. In response, Councillor Sutton indicated he would speak to

officers to see if the Programme could be developed further, if the statutory guidance permitted.

Councillor Sutton also paid tribute to the officers who had developed and ran the HAF.

Investment in Staffordshire Roads

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Councillor Price referred to the overnight closures on the M6 motorway and its impact on the residents living along the A34. He also welcomed the proposals for the reconstruction of the A34 which would start in early 2023.

Councillor Hood congratulated the Highways team for the work on the A34 in Stone and welcomed the proposals for the repair of the Walton Roundabout.

Councillor Hutton extended his thanks to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport for the recent improvements in grass cutting in urban areas. Councillor Tagg also welcomed the improvement in grass cutting in Newcastle. Councillor Huckfield added that grass cuttings were not collected and often ended-up in drains and gullies when it rained. He enquired as to whether the grass cuttings could be collected and recycled. In response, Councillor David Williams indicated that collecting grass cuttings would substantially increase costs.

Councillor Perry extended her thanks to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport for the investment being made in the highway network in her division.

Councillor Trowbridge referred to the need for maintenance works along the A449 in Stafford.

In response to comments from Councillor Philip Atkins concerning new technology in highway maintenance, Councillor David Williams and Councillor Alan White indicated the Council was investigating new technologies and innovations including JCBs "Pot Hole Pro". Councillor White added that the Council's proposed investment in its highway network this year was £67m.

Commonwealth Games

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Councillors Loughborough-Rudd, Oates, McMahon, Trowbridge, Cox, Greatorex, Sweeney, Sutherland and Wilson paid tribute to the baton bearers for the contributions they had made to their local communities and they also highlighted some of the local events which were planned or had taken place in their respective areas as part of the lead-up to the games. Members also wished the athletes taking part in the Games the best of luck.

Councillor McMahon also spoke about the need to capture the legacy arising from the Games and that the Leaders' Board could play a role in this.

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

20. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021-2022

Councillor Greatorex moved consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021 – 2022.

Councillor Greatorex outlined the vital role played by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and how there had been a return to the norm following the Covid pandemic. He also extended his thanks to the Members of the Council's Cabinet for engaging in the Overview and Scrutiny process.

Councillors Greatorex, Clements, Spencer and Pert outlined some of the work their Committees had undertaken over the year including a joint review on sexual harassment in schools. They also expressed thanks to their fellow Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Scrutiny Officers and also to the other officers who supported them.

Councillor Tagg expressed his thanks to the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their work in relation to the issues at Walley's Quarry. Councillor Alan White also paid tribute to the diligent work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and highlighted the valuable contribution they made to the work of the Council. He also asked the Committees to continue their good work.

Resolved – That the Scrutiny Annual Report 2021 - 2022 be received.

21. Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2021-22

Councillor Sutton moved consideration of the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-22.

He informed Members that the way the Panel operated had changed so that it became more interactive and listened more to the views of the young people. He also extended his thanks to his fellow Panel Members and also to the officers who supported them.

Councillor Edgeller referred to how support for children in care had changed over the last decade and she, together with Councillor Hood, extended their thanks to Councillor Sutton for his dedication and leadership.

Councillor Sutton thanked Members for their comments and also paid tribute to the county's Foster Carers.

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

22. 2021 Community Fund - 2021/22 Report and Next Steps

Councillor Wilson indicated that around 160 different organisations across the County had been helped during the year with Covid recovery related projects.

Councillors Clements and Cox outlined projects which had been supported in their respective areas and how Members had worked together to pool their funding.

Councillor Alan White paid tribute to Members for the hard work they undertook in their respective divisions.

Resolved – That the report be received.

23. Recommendations to the Council

(a) Procurement Regulations - Proposed Addition

The Council's approval was sought to a proposed addition to the Procurement Regulations to exempt from their standard tendering/quotation process the engagement of an HR adviser in very specific circumstances.

Members were informed that the exemption was needed to enable the Council's Director for Corporate Services to follow due process when dealing with any employment disciplinary matter involving HR personnel. To date the Director had needed to call on the support of Senior officers from service areas sufficiently distanced from the HR function however, in some circumstances they had, understandably, not possessed the depth of knowledge and expertise required.

Resolved – That the proposed addition to the Procurement Regulations to exempt from their standard tendering/quotation process the engagement of an HR adviser in very specific circumstances be agreed and that the Procurement Regulations be amended accordingly.

(b) Health and Wellbeing Board - Changes to the Constitution

The Council's approval was sought to make changes to the arrangements for chairing the Staffordshire Health and Well-being Board. The proposed revised arrangements took into account the establishment of the Integrated Care System, that the Clinical Commissioning Groups had been abolished and

replaced by the NHS Integrated Care Board, and that Councillor Dr Johnny McMahan and Dr Alison Bradley had recently stood down as co-chairs.

Resolved - That the proposed changes to the Health and Wellbeing Board's Constitution, as set out in paragraphs 2(a), (b) (c) and (d) of the report, be approved.

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

In response to a question from Councillor Charlotte Atkins regarding Staffordshire Police being placed in Special Measures by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, Councillor Cox indicated that the Panel was aware of the issues and would hold the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to account to ensure that the areas of concern were addressed.

Resolved – That the report be received.

25. Questions

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

Question

Yesterday Tamworth hosted the Queens Baton Relay, with the baton ending its journey through Tamworth at a huge festival of sport and music in the town centre. Tamworth has also secured another honour, being the only Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Festival Site in Staffordshire. Over the next three weeks Tamworth will be showing Live footage of the games in the Castle Grounds, as well as putting on be a three-week summer festival of sports, entertainment, concerts and community events.

Will the Leader of the Council join me in congratulating Tamworth, and all those officers and volunteers, who have worked so hard in securing this amazing event?

Reply

Staffordshire County Council (SCC) congratulates all eight districts and boroughs for their involvement and co-ordination of events for The Queen's Baton Relay. SCC recognises the commitment made by Tamworth District Council to offer the Commonwealth Games Festival Site providing live footage of the games over the coming weeks of sport.

SCC has been committed to supporting all the districts with their plans for The Queen's Baton Relay. Co-ordinating a county-wide group to discuss and co-ordinate the events, offering support from relevant teams to ensure the events could be delivered efficiently, safely and were well promoted to Staffordshire residents. Comms have been actively involved in sharing the social media posts (on all platforms available) from all district councils. All the activities, routes and events were and will continue to be (where applicable) communicated via a dedicated webpage on SCC's website to ensure Staffordshire residents would know how and when to get involved with The Queen's Baton Relay and Commonwealth Games in the County.

SCC look forward to the start of the Commonwealth Games on 28 July and in particular the two events that will take place within our county: the Mountain Bike event which will be held on Cannock Chase on 3 August and the Cycling Time Trial on 4 August in South Staffordshire.

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

Question

Tamworth is in a unique situation being almost completely urban and without many rural roads, this means almost all roads have kerb stones.

Each year we see weeds growing up to 2ft high in these kerbs, not only are they unsightly but their roots will be creating gaps in between kerb stones and slabs which will fill with water then freeze and then become an expensive pothole or broken kerb stone/slab. These are our assets to maintain, so could the portfolio holder look to support more weed suppression in urban areas particularly Tamworth, in order to reduce future highways repair costs?

Reply

As part of the new vision and investment in highways we will be reviewing services that both improve the condition of our road network and have environmental benefits for our communities throughout Staffordshire.

Current weed control operations are undertaken to mitigate any structural damage to the highway infrastructure and improve visibility at key locations. However, there are number of factors that limit the effectiveness of this routine maintenance service.

To meet previous MTFS savings, the frequency of weed treatment was reduced to just once each growing season. Added to this, the chemicals used are environmentally regulated and the treatment is only effective on

growing plants. This effectiveness can also be reduced if it rains after treatment.

Several alternative treatment methods do exist, some being more expensive and less effective at killing the weed at source. However, we are currently investigating new technologies, their cost to benefit ratios and what schemes can be employed to support our climate emergency ambitions.

However, a particularly useful method of weed prevention is through regular road sweeping activity. Therefore, part of any future weed treatment solution will include looking for support from local councils to maintain, and in some cases possibly increase, the amount of local road sweeping activity.

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

Question

Please can the Cabinet Member please tell me the costs to repair pavements specifically in Tamworth where people use them to park inconsiderately and make them unsafe for pedestrians and those with disabilities?

Reply

Parking on the footway can obstruct and seriously inconvenience pedestrians, people in wheelchairs or with visual impairments and people with prams or pushchairs.

Rule 244 of the Highway Code clearly states that drivers must not park partially or wholly on the pavement in London and should not elsewhere unless signs permit it.

In 2020, the Department for Transport carried out a consultation on managing pavement parking which outlined options to tackle pavement parking at a local authority or national level which included three options; improving the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process, under which local authorities can already prohibit pavement parking; a legislative change to allow local authorities with civil parking enforcement powers to enforce against 'unnecessary obstruction of the pavement'; or a legislative change to introduce a London-style pavement parking prohibition throughout England.

The consultation closed in November 2020 and as of July 2022, the Department for Transport advice on the consultation page is that the feedback is being analysed.

Currently, if there are no parking restrictions and vehicles are parked in contravention of the rules of the Highway Code the matter can be reported to the police who have access to powers enabling them to identify vehicle owners and issue on the spot fines if necessary.

We repaired around 2,300 footway defects across the county in the past year at a cost of around quarter of a million pounds. However, but we don't collect the cause of defects so it's not possible to say how many of these were as a result of footway parking as opposed to other general ageing and deterioration.

Councillor Jay asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:

Question

Tamworth has recently seen some large and disruptive traveller encampments. Residents are concerned about the mess caused to open spaces and parks, as well as the anti-social behaviour that can take place while camps are there. There is also the not insignificant cost associated with cleaning the County Council owned space after the travellers have left. What is the County Council doing to ensure its open spaces in Tamworth are secured against encroachment by unauthorised travellers?

Reply

There has been very little impact on property under the control of the County Council in Tamworth. Since the beginning of 2021 there has only been one report of travellers, but they had moved on by the following day.

The vast majority of council owned open space in Tamworth is school land where access is controlled, whilst there is some highway land this is operational highway in all but one location. There is no county council-controlled park land.

Countywide, the majority of traveller encampments affecting council-controlled properties are on either country parks or highway. We are not generally allowed to restrict access to these areas; where we are able to do so, we balance legitimate access needs to the risk of encampments.

Councillor Ford asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:

Question

Sitting in the south-east of the county, Tamworth shares a significant length of border with Warwickshire. Given that political boundaries mean very little to most residents, what guidance can be given to ensure that cross-border issues are resolved in a satisfactory and timely manner?

Reply

The county council has a strong track record of working with partners regionally and nationally to deliver against our ambitions. We proactively engage in a range of regional strategic partnerships such as Midlands Connect and the Midlands Engine to support the delivery of our priorities. We also engage in a range of local government networks, such as the County Council Network and Local Government Association, that provide opportunities to continue to build strong strategic relationships with our neighbouring authorities and beyond.

At a service level, we have a range of different mechanisms and arrangements in place to address cross-border issues. A few examples include:

- The School Organisation Team works closely with all neighbouring authorities on school place planning matters. Recently the Team have worked to secure additional school places to mitigate the impact of proposed residential developments on the border.
- The Highways Team maintains good working relationships with all neighbouring councils. Staffordshire County Council is a founder member of the Midlands Highway Alliance Plus, 35 local highway authorities working together to share learning, best practice, and closer collaboration.
- Within Adult Social Care there are a range of operational arrangements in place to support cross-border arrangements, for example Staffordshire residents accessing social care services, such as a care home in another local authority area.
- In my own portfolio, we have some significant examples of cross border working. Warwickshire and Staffordshire Library colleagues regularly share best practice and initiatives such as the Community Managed Library Model, with volunteers from both areas sharing their experiences and learning.

We fully appreciate that residents do not recognise boundaries in terms of accessing public services, and we work well with our neighbouring authorities. Staffordshire County Council is committed to working with all relevant partners to deliver the best possible outcomes for Staffordshire.

Councillor Edgeller asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:

Question

The A34 in the South East Division is not mentioned in the extra funding that has been allocated to the County Council, I refer to the £3 plus million.

My concern is the state of the A34 leading into Stafford which is a major commuter Gateway into the town from the south. It is also a major principal road when an accident occurs between junctions 12 and 13 on the M6. This means this road is then subject to very heavy motorway diverted traffic on top of the existing traffic.

The Radford Bank Islands are currently in a dreadful state and a danger especially to cyclist and motorbikes. From the Radford Public House to the Queensville Island also needs immediate attention. I have raised this issue many many times previously and is still waiting for attention.

I might add also along the A34 Cannock Rd needs to be a 30 miles an hour area to the bottom of Holdcroft Rd.

When are we going to see some action on the above questions please?

Reply

A top priority for the county council is to fix more roads, which is why during 22/23 the council is investing an extra £15M in capital maintenance schemes and operations.

However, with many locations needing attention and government grant funding for highway maintenance reducing it is vital that we leave no stone unturned when it comes to identifying every other potential sources of funding opportunity.

Earlier this year the government announced a second round of its Levelling Up Fund (LUF2), inviting bids of up to £20M to achieve the Levelling up White Paper Missions, including Transport Infrastructure, Living Standards, Skills, Health, Well-being, and Pride in Place.

Many sections of the A34 through Stafford, which is part of the national Major Road Network (MRN), are key to the LUF2 aims locally and so are included in Staffordshire's bid. If successful, major structural maintenance works and sustainable transport improvements along this route will be carried out during 2023/24 and 2024/25.

To compliment the council's LUF2 bid and maximise the benefit of all the potential funding available the council's own investment during 22/23 is being targeted to other major key gateway locations across the county.

Supplementary Question

Is there any way that the work on the A34 can be brought forward please?

Reply

We will endeavour to look into it.

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

Question

Residents are continually telling me they no longer even bother trying to get a GP appointment. They just go straight to A and E. With people also dying waiting for ambulances, what is the County Council doing to hold the local NHS to account for its failures during what has become a dangerous health service crisis?

Reply

It has been clear for a long time that the NHS, including access to GPs, is under considerable pressure. Demand is rising and the NHS is finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff. This was evident before Covid and has been exacerbated by the pandemic. We have seen 'Major Incidents' called several times by the County's acute trusts over the past twelve months such has been the pressures on the system. It is important that we all work together to try and support the NHS to manage these pressures in an effective way.

Our Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding the NHS to account and includes colleagues from County as well as District and Borough councils. The Committee regularly calls on the NHS to provide assurance that their services are operating to the standards we expect.

The Committee scrutinised management of NHS pressures in December 2021 and access to GPs in July and December 2021 – and the webcast is available on the Council's website. The Committee's work programme for 2022/23 outlines planned scrutiny of the NHS – and the September meeting includes a further agenda item to scrutinise how system pressures will be managed. I would also draw attention to the Scrutiny

Annual Report 2021/22 (which forms part of today's Council agenda), whereby reference is given to the ongoing scrutiny of GP access.

Supplementary Question

Why is it, considering that this is a life and death situation, that I do not have an answer which says "you're quite right, we need to drop everything and sort this out and treat it like the emergency it is?"

Reply

As the response sets out quite clearly, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the role of holding the health care services to account; it is not a Cabinet Member role. However, I would add that, at the meeting of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 July, Members considered a Primary Care GP Access plan update report which considered the key drivers regarding GP access in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. They also considered a report about the Integrated Care Board and System where members highlighted pressures, patient flow through hospitals and the need to scrutinise pressures across the whole system. Both reports, and the webcast, can be viewed on Mod.Gov. I can assure Councillor Pardesi that Councillor Pert and his Overview and Scrutiny Committee regularly and thoroughly hold key members of the NHS to account.

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

Question

In the light of Ofsted's judgement that Leek High School is inadequate and requires special measures, what support will the County Council be offering the school? What are the wider implications for education within Leek of this Ofsted verdict?

Reply

Leek High School is part of The Talentum Learning Trust which is a Leek based academy trust. The local authority wants all children to receive the best education possible and wants all Staffordshire schools to be judged at least good. Where an academy school is judged as inadequate, it is the Regional Director (previously known as the Regional Schools Commissioner) who will make the decision about the future of the school. The WM Regional Director has issued a Termination Warning Notice to the academy trust. The trust are required to provide written evidence to demonstrate their capacity to deliver rapid and sustainable improvement at the academy. If the Regional Director is not satisfied that this can be

achieved, he will consider whether to terminate the funding agreement in order to transfer the academy to an alternative academy trust.

The LA continues to meet regularly with officers from the DfE regions group' office of the Regional Director to discuss schools and academies that are causing concern. Leek High School and The Talentum Learning Trust are part of these discussions. As a decision about Leek High School are made, the LA will want to ensure this does not impact negatively on education offer across Leek.

The local authority still has a statutory responsibility for safeguarding children and young people. As soon as the LA was aware of the safeguarding concerns raised within the report, contact was made with the Academy Trust and support offered. The LA education safeguarding lead has since visited the school to undertake a robust safeguarding audit and supported in the drafting of an action plan to address safeguarding issues. The safeguarding lead has arranged to revisit the school to review the impact of actions taken.

Supplementary Question

I hope that the Community will be fully involved in any discussions about the future of the school and any implications arising therefrom? I thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about my views.

Reply

Obviously, I am aware of the issues that are ongoing in Leek and there is also an alternative provision on site as well which is doing some really good work. I have offered to meet with yourself to discuss the wider issues and I shall set that meeting up as soon as possible.

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

Question

As a councillor, I often get disparaging remarks about Burton's road conditions, such as "potholes are so awful in Burton it's like driving over "craters on the moon." What can the cabinet member do to enhance Burton's roads?

Reply

Staffordshire's huge road network is vital for keeping our county connected and its residents and businesses on the move.

This year we are investing over £50 million in a range of major projects, vital local improvements, and general road maintenance, including an additional £15.5M funded directly by the County Council to fix more roads.

In Burton specifically over the last two years we've invested over £2M in mix of structural maintenance, surface treatments and reactive repairs to potholes.

And subject to confirmation of future funding we plan to invest a further £1M on preventative treatments between this year and 2024 and have identified a £4.1M of other high priority structural maintenance needs.

We recognise that there is always more to be done and we continue to lobby central Government for the money necessary to keep Staffordshire's roads in the condition we expect and is needed to ensure local communities and businesses are able to see the benefits of an improved highway network.

One example is within our LUF2 we are bidding for £6m to invest in improvements at Burton's southern intersection with the A38(T) and the connecting links on the A5121. The scheme includes carriageway maintenance, carriageway widening through the junction and on the approaches, new traffic signal controllers and improvements at the adjacent B5018/A5121 junction.

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

Question

What remedies will the council consider in response to the anticipated decrease in quality and quantity of school meals owing to inflation?

Reply

Individual schools and academy trusts are responsible for procuring their school meals. The government has set school food standards which are designed to help children develop healthy eating habits and ensure that they have the energy and nutrition they need to get the most from their whole school day.

When agreeing a contract, school leaders should ensure the contract specification includes the School Food Standards, Professional Standards, food quality and lunchtime experience.

Through the joint venture company Entrust, many schools have a schools meal contract with 'Chartwells'. This contract does include an expectation that the school food standards will be delivered.

Across the country school meal providers will be facing the same challenges. It is for schools to ensure that standards are maintained.

26. Petitions

Management of HGVs on Cemetery Road, Silverdale, Newcastle

Councillor Tagg submitted a petition from local residents seeking the introduction of measures to manage HGVs on Cemetery Road, Silverdale, Newcastle.

Chairman