

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 13 October 2022

Attendance

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

Apologies for absence: Mark Deaville, Jill Hood and Tom Loughbrough-Rudd

PART ONE

27. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 July 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 21 July 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

28. Chairman's Correspondence

Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The Chairman informed the Council that, although this was the news that we had been fearing for a little while, the announcement of the passing of Her Majesty was a huge shock to us all. It was undoubtedly a sadness which was felt across the county and the country. Her Majesty had been a constant, reassuring presence in our lives for so long. Her life of service to the country and its people had been a beacon for us.

The Chairman added that he looked forward with confidence to the reign of our new King and particularly to be able to welcome him on future visits to the County.

County Councillor Ian Lawson

The Chairman informed Members of the death, on 9 October 2022, of County Councillor Ian Lawson.

Mr Lawson had represented the Biddulph North (Staffordshire Moorlands) Electoral Division on the County Council since 2009.

He served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Social Care Scrutiny Committee; Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee; Regeneration and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee; Property, Skills and Education Select Committee; Planning Committee; Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee; Audit and Standards Committee; Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee; Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education; the Charities and Trusts Committee and also the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire Authority.

Mr Lawson also served as Chairman of the County Council between May 2012 and May 2015.

Councillors Sutton, Eagland, Francis, Sutherland, Heath, Flunder, Smith, Hussain, Perry, Winnington, Ward and Alan White paid tribute to the contribution made by Mr Lawson to the work of the Council following which Members stood and observed a one-minute silence in his memory.

29. 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.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Councillor Smith expressed his thanks for the £20m investment which had been made in his electoral division.

Councillor Afsar referred to the impact of increasing energy prices on businesses across the County and enquired as to whether the County Council, working with the District and Borough Councils, would intervene to offer these businesses support in order to save jobs and livelihoods. In response, Councillor Greatorex indicated that the Government had recently introduced a national scheme to provide subsidies to businesses to help them through the rise in energy prices and that this scheme would run for six months.

Councillor Pert expressed his thanks to local residents for their forbearance whilst roadworks continued along the A34 to the north of Stafford. He also referred to the jobs which would be created by the new Pets at Home European Headquarters at Redhill.

In response to a comment from Councillor Pardesi that she was still awaiting a response to a question she raised at the Council meeting in July, Councillors Philip White and Alan White apologised for the omission and undertook to furnish her with a reply.

In response to a question from Councillor Hussain concerning pre-planning application advice, Councillor Alan White indicated that the County Council, through the Leaders Board, was working closely with the Borough and District Councils, to make services more effective and seamless.

Councillor Sweeney spoke about "Town Deals" and how this acted as seed funding to bring forward new job creation projects such as the development of the Chatterley Valley Business Park in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Councillor Sutherland paid tribute to the Council for the support it made available to businesses across the County. Councillor Philip White added that the Council was committed to working with partners to help people into work and he made particular reference to the Job Brokerage Scheme.

Approval of Staffordshire County Council's Community Learning Procurement Arrangements 2023 to 2027

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Councillor Philip White paid tribute to the excellent work of the Council's Community Learning Team.

Integrated Performance Report – Quarter 1, 2022/23

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Charlotte Atkins concerning filling the additional posts required as a consequence of the Government's Social Care Reform, Councillor Jessel indicated that the Council was working on the assumption that the current timetable for implementation still stood, however, recruitment and retention was still an issue, both nationally and locally, but the Council was working hard to find local solutions to the problem including increases in the rate of pay in the sector.

Councillor Parry updated Members on the financial position of the Council at the end of Quarter 2 which was to be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 19 October 2022. He explained that the latest revenue forecast outturn showed a forecast overspend of £10.908m (1.9%), prior to

additional funding for inflationary pressures being taken into account. Once this one-off funding was included and an allocation from the Inflation Reserve was assumed, the overspend reduced to £6.408m (1.1%). This was compared to an overspend of £3.643m reported at Quarter 1. He added workforce capacity, recruitment and demand challenges remained, particularly within Health and Care and Families and Communities.

Contract for the Supply of Electricity and Associated Services (Call off from YPO Framework 791)

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Councillor Smith spoke about the current volatility in energy prices and the need for the Council to explore how it could help Staffordshire's communities. In response, Councillor Alan White referred Councillor Smith to paragraph 12 of the Leader's Statement and, in particular, the Council's Here to Help Campaign.

Councillor Greatorix added that the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group had been looking at the impact of the increases in energy prices and he also suggested that sharing the contracting arrangements for the supply of the Council's electricity with the Borough and District Councils could be explored.

Councillor Hussain referred to reference in the news about the risk of power cuts over the winter period and enquired as to whether the Council had in place any contingency plans should these power cuts materialise. In response, Councillor Alan White confirmed that he had been assured that contingency plans were in place.

Councillor Francis spoke about major failings in the UK's Energy Policy and Councillor Pardesi referred to the need to put an end to corporate greed.

Multiply - National Numeracy programme

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Councillor Afsar indicated his support for the programme and enquired as to which age groups were to be targeted. Councillor Hutton also welcomed the initiative and enquired as to whether "budgeting" was included as part of the Programme. In response, Councillor Philip White confirmed that the programme was aimed at those aged 19 and above and that it did include "household finance".

Staying Well

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Councillor Northcott spoke about the need for the Council to encourage residents to look after their own health such as by stopping smoking and

taking up the offer of Covid Booster vaccinations and the flu jab if they are eligible.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins referred to the need for the Midlands Partnership NHS Trust to improve the coordination of Covid Vaccination walk-in sessions in Leek. In response, Cllr Edgeller and Councillor Jessel indicated that they would raise Councillor Atkins' concerns with the relevant NHS body.

Councillor Huckfield referred to the excellent arrangements in place at vaccination centres in Newcastle-under-Lyme and both he and Councillor McMahon encouraged everyone who was eligible to get vaccinated.

Enhanced Homecare Service

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Councillor Jessel indicated that the Enhanced Homecare Service was just one example of how the Council was looking at new ways to encourage and foster independence. She added that the service would commence in North Staffordshire and would hopefully be implemented across the whole County in time.

Hearing Aid Rule Changes

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Councillor McMahon welcomed the Integrated Care Board's decision to widen the offer of hearing aids to all people with mild hearing loss, rather than just some as this would help to tackle issues such as social isolation. He, together with Councillors Pert and Alan White, also paid tribute to Councillor Perry and to her fellow members of the Health Scrutiny Committee for their campaigning on this issue.

Councillors Charlotte Atkins, Tagg and Smith also welcomed the decision which had taken seven years to come to fruition. Councillor Pert added that 343 Staffordshire residents would benefit from the decision per year.

Councillor Alan White also spoke about the need for more democratic participation in NHS decision making.

War in Ukraine

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Councillors Philip Atkins and Cox extended their thanks to those households in the County who had taken in refugees from the war in Ukraine. Councillors Cox and Francis also referred to the need to extend the scheme beyond the initial six month period. In response, Councillor Wilson indicated that there were currently 660 Ukrainians living with sponsors in Staffordshire.

Councillor Philip Atkins also spoke about the impact of the war on the farming community in Ukraine and also how the conflict had adversely affected food and energy prices in the UK.

Councillor Alan White indicated that the war in Ukraine was likely to grind on and on and, at its conclusion, the country would need rebuilding.

Cost of Living

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Councillor Sutton spoke about how Government funding under the Household Support Fund and the Holiday Activity and Food programme was being utilised across the County. He added that the next tranche of the fund, which totalled £1.6m, would be used to support people over the October half-term and Christmas holidays and also to provide support for care leavers. Cllr Sutton also referred to the ongoing work across the County under the Warmer Homes Project.

Councillor Wilson referred to the various initiatives taking place across the County to support Staffordshire residents over the winter period.

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

30. Staffordshire Electoral Review - Council Size Submission

The Council were informed that, in March 2022, the Local Government Boundary Commission initiated an Electoral Review of Staffordshire. The rationale for undertaking an Electoral Review was both due to the County's changing population which had led to electoral inequality, and the length of time since the last review. There were two key stages to an Electoral Review: Stage 1 – which considered the Council Size; and Stage 2 – which considered division arrangements. Stage 1 commenced in June 2022 and the County Council was required to submit its Council Size submission to the Boundary Commission by 11 November 2022.

Members noted that the Council's Submission proposed that the County Council:

- a) Retains the current council size of 62 Elected Members
- b) Requests a single Member per division review

The evidence outlined in the Submission demonstrated that the current council size of 62 Elected Members supported the Council to efficiently and effectively undertake the three key aspects the Boundary Commission considered when considering Council Size:

(i) Strategic Leadership – how many Elected Members were required to give strategic leadership and direction to the authority?

(ii) Accountability – how many Elected Members were required to provide scrutiny to the authority? How many Elected Members were required to meet the regulatory requirements of the authority?

(iii) Community Leadership – how the representation role of Elected members in the local community was discharged and how they engaged with people and conduct casework.

It was noted that the County Council's current electoral arrangements included two Divisions with two Elected Members. The Submission outlined that these arrangements did not provide the most efficient conditions for community representation. Representing a larger electorate presented difficulties, and it was acknowledged that it could be difficult to split casework, and for electors to easily identify who 'their Councillor' was. As such, it was proposed that that County Council requests a single member per division review.

Members were also informed that the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Council Submission on 13 September 2022. The Committee agreed with the proposals within the Submission and feedback from the Committee had been incorporated into the Submission document. Cabinet also considered the draft Council Size Submission on 21st September and approved the Council Size proposals.

Councillor Winnington referred to the growth in the population of the County, with some electoral divisions having one and a half times the number of electors than the average. He added that, although the proposal to retain the current Council size of 62 was sensible, it may be that some areas warranted an additional seat. In response, Councillor Philip White indicated that the proposal to retain the current council size of 62 Elected Members was the minimum number the Council considered necessary and it may be that under stage 2 of the Review, which considered division arrangements, the case may be made for more electoral divisions. Councillor Alan White encouraged all Members to participate in Stage 2 of the Review and he expressed his thanks to those members of staff who were supporting the review process.

Councillor Hussain expressed his support for the proposals contained in the report.

Resolved – (a) That it be agreed that, within the Council Size Submission proposals, the County Council:

- i) Retains the current council size of 62 Elected Members

ii) Requests a single member per division review

(b) That the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services be authorised to finalise the details of the Council Size Submission prior to submitting it to the Boundary Commission.

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

In response to a question from Councillor Pardesi concerning the possibility of Firefighters, who were taking strike action over a dispute over pay, not attending emergencies, Councillor David Williams indicated that not all Firefighters were members of the Fire Brigades Union and that he could not foresee a situation where incidents requiring their attendance were not covered.

Councillors Hudson and Cox referred to the recent the Inspection report which had had raised a number of areas which needed improvement and they indicated that, although they could not defend the Force's failings, they had every faith in the new Chief Constable that these matters would be addressed. Councillor Edgeller also commended the Chief Constable.

Councillor Afsar raised concerns in relation to an increase in anti-social behaviour in Burton.

Councillor Philip Atkins spoke about the lack of visible policing and that there was a very small proportion of the population committing the vast majority of crimes.

Councillors Edgeller and Peters also encouraged Members to inform their constituents about the Performance meetings held with the Chief Constable which were open to the public and could be viewed via a webcast.

Resolved – That the report be received.

32. Questions

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

Question

In August residents of my division, and the wider town, suffered as a result of the closure of the Ashby Road for utility works. Some residents were completely cut off from Tamworth by the closure, due to the 24 minute diversion.

Can the council look at how the rules on road closures could be updated to include residents in these decisions? This would both benefit residents effected by such roadworks and the Authority's reputation.

Reply

Ashby Road rail bridge is a specific pinch point in the County where any roadworks will most often require a closure due to the width.

New developments are progressing along the Ashby Road, No Mans Heath corridor and require various utility connections. The council's Traffic and Network management team coordinate these works and deliberately held-up the recent works so that they would be carried out in the quieter August summer holiday period.

For the residents to the East of the bridge this obviously caused some disruption. However, as with any road closure, advance notice was provided and a signed diversion route put in place, with alternative unsigned local routes also available and regularly used by local traffic.

Responsibility for the communication of a road closure rests with the individual utility provider, developer, or contractor. In addition to the legal notices all the remaining requirements, including letter drop, advance signage and discussion with affected bus companies, were all followed for this closure.

As part of the wider highways transformation programme, we will be reviewing best practice and considering what additional measures can be made to help raise awareness and reduce the impact of works that are likely to cause significant disruption to local communities or adversely impact on the council's reputation.

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

Question

Small charities, community enterprises and local groups are doing heroic work in this cost-of-living crisis by supporting families through the food bank and soup kitchens and so on. How can the council help them to carry on their fantastic effort, especially in areas like Eaton, Shobnall, Anglesey, Stapenhill, and so on?

Reply

First of all, I would like to join Cllr Hussain in expressing my appreciation and thanks for the tireless efforts of community groups across Staffordshire in supporting residents with a range of issues, including the cost of living. The Council has recently launched a campaign, to highlight the help and support that is available throughout the county to tackle the current cost of living pressures. The 'Here to help' campaign is directing people to support on things like managing debt, paying bills, food and essentials, staying warm and helping others.

The voluntary sector plays a vital role in making Staffordshire a great place to live, where everyone can prosper, be healthy and happy. Across the Council we work in partnership with the voluntary sector and our communities on a wide range of different initiatives and priorities, including the Community Champions Programme in parts of Burton. The Council has recently recommissioned its VCSE Capacity Building Framework to provide vital support to community groups and the voluntary sector to access training and development support, secure additional funding and recruit volunteers. This three-year contract, invests £1.5m into supporting our local voluntary sector.

Through our Community Fund, local community groups have the opportunity to access small grants to help support a huge range of community activities. In 2021 we supported 156 different community groups, with a total of £114,000 awarded. The 2022 Fund is currently open to applications until the end of October.

Supplementary Question

The rules for the payment of grants available under the Fund state that they can not be used for on-going costs such as rent. Will the Cabinet Member meet with me and some of the community centres/groups to see how we can best support them.

Reply

Yes, I would be delighted to.

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

Question

According to the Sutton Trust, only 30% of year 13 students nationwide completed work experience. Is there a figure for the percentage of year 13

students in Staffordshire who are excluded from gaining valuable work experience, and what can be done to improve the situation? (Reference: Page 8 Local Government first, no 670 April 2022)

Reply

Staffordshire County Council does not collect this information on behalf of schools and colleges. Every school and college should have an embedded programme of career education and guidance that is known and understood by students, parents, teachers, governors, employers and other agencies.

The Department for Education expects all schools and colleges to use the internationally recognised Gatsby Benchmarks to develop a careers programme that increases opportunities for students to access everything from experiences of the workplace and personal guidance with a careers adviser, to engagement with employers, colleges, training providers and universities. The benchmarks are non-statutory but support schools and colleges by providing a framework around which they can develop their careers programme in line with their legal requirements to provide independent careers guidance to pupils throughout their secondary education (11- to 18-year-olds). Benchmark 6 sets out that every student should have first-hand experiences of the workplace through work visits, work shadowing or work experience to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks.

This benchmark is less about work experience and more about experiences of the workplace. Employers will have a critical role in providing 16- to 18-year-old students with first-hand experience of their chosen occupational area in an authentic setting over a long period of time.

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

Question

What effective involvement does Staffordshire County Council have with the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Integrated Care Board?

Reply

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB) are now responsible for arranging NHS services in Staffordshire. The Council is involved with the ICB in a number of ways:

1. The Council's Chief Executive sits on the Board of the ICB

2. The Council and the ICB are statutory partners in the Integrated Care Partnership, which is co-chaired by the leaders of Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council
3. The ICB is a statutory member of the Health and Well-being Board
4. The Council and the ICB co-operate on a range of programmes to improve and integrate health and care services – for example hospital discharge services, creating a single health and care record, sustaining the workforce and supporting independent sector providers to improve quality of care.

Councillor Pardesi asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People whose reply is set out below the question: -

Question

What is this Council's response when headteachers across the country report that children are so hungry they are eating rubbers, hiding in the playground because they don't have lunch money and even pretending to eat out of empty lunch boxes?

Reply

Children in reception and KS1 aged 4yrs – 7yrs old are entitled to universal free school meals and so are able to access a cooked meal each day at school. Where headteachers are aware of children attending school hungry, they will support parents in checking the eligibility for free school meals. If there is no eligibility, then the school would look to support children so that they are not going hungry. Schools will also signpost families to other agencies who will be able to assist with food parcels and vouchers to be used during certain school holidays.

Parents claiming some benefits can claim free school meals for any of their children who are registered at a Staffordshire school and who would normally be at school at lunch time. School meals are a good way to ensure that your child eats well at lunchtime, and you can save yourself time and money.

[Overview - Free school meals - Staffordshire County Council](#)

We have been using the Household Support Fund allocated to Staffordshire County Council to ensure that throughout the school holidays children in receipt of free school meals are able to access food vouchers to ensure people have access to help and support when they are not in school. This has resulted in,

1. A £15.00 Voucher to children eligible for Free School Meals over the May Half Term and for two weeks over the summer holidays.

2. Vouchers to support our care leavers.
3. Provided additional funding to enable the Staffordshire Warmer Homes Scheme [Staffordshire Warmer Homes - Warm Homes Scheme](#)

If you would like more information on how Staffordshire County Council will use this funding, please click on the link - [Cabinet Report \(staffordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

[Household Support Fund 2022 | Staffordshire Connects](#)

Supplementary Question

When can schools expect more funding to support children who are coming in hungry?

Reply

This is a question that should be put to the Secretary of State for Education, not me.

33. Petitions

(i) Condition of the Pavements in Yoxall

Councillor Jessel submitted a petition from local residents complaining about the poor condition of the pavements along various roads in Yoxall.

(ii) Request for the removal of Lime Trees along Hillport Avenue, Wolstanton

Councillor Hutton submitted a petition from local residents requesting the removal/pruning of Lime Trees along Hillport Avenue, Wolstanton due to damage being caused to vehicles and property.

(iii) Closure of Shay Lane, Sebdon

Councillor Winnington submitted a petition from local residents requesting the prioritisation of repairs to Shay Lane, Sebdon to enable the road to be re-opened.

Chairman