

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 8 December 2022

Attendance

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

Apologies for absence: Richard Cox, Richard Ford, John Francis, Thomas Jay and Jill Waring

PART ONE

34. 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	37	Personal	Director of Nexus
Mark Winnington	37	Personal	Non-Executive Director of Nexus

35. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 October 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 13 October 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

36. Chairman's Correspondence

There were no items of Chairman's Correspondence on this occasion.

37. 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

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Councillor Philip White referred to the Council's submission to central government, putting forward the A50-A500 Hydrogen Technologies Corridor in Staffordshire as a potential Investment Zone and the West Midlands Interchange (WMI) project in South Staffordshire; both of which would have an impact on de-carbonising the County.

Councillor Flunder indicated his support for the Council's various initiatives to support the Staffordshire economy. He also referred to the recent announcement that the Staffordshire Moorlands was to benefit from £3.4m in government funding to support projects to help local businesses and improve infrastructure.

Councillor Hussain referred to the reference in the Statement that the youth claimant count in Staffordshire had seen an increase of 80 to a total of 2,635 young people and enquired as to the reasons behind this increase. In response, Councillor Alan White indicated that young people tended to work in occupations where there were higher levels of "churn" such as hospitality. He also added that the number of young people who were not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) in the county was very low.

Councillor Tagg enquired of the Leader of the Council as to whether he would commit to working closely with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council on the regeneration of the Ryecroft site.

Councillor Hudson indicated that he welcomed the Statement and he spoke about the positive impact on his division which would accrue from the proposals for the A50-A500 Hydrogen Technologies Corridor. He also spoke about the forthcoming proposals for the regeneration of the Maltings in Uttoxeter and hoped that they would be supported by the County Council.

Councillor Deaville spoke about small businesses being the lifeblood of the Staffordshire economy along with the large employers such as JCB who had recently opened a new cab manufacturing plant near Uttoxeter.

Councillor Smith referred to the need for the District and Borough Councils to commit to working with the County Council to embrace opportunities for development.

Councillor Alan White expressed his thanks to Members for their comments and also praised the work of the Council's Economic Development Team and the partner agencies they worked with. He confirmed that the Council would continue to work with partners, including the District and Borough Councils, to improve the outlook for town centres across the county.

Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 2, 2022/23

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Councillor Charlotte Atkins referred to the announcement in the Government's Autumn Statement in respect of the delay in the bringing forward reforms to Social Care and enquired as to whether this would have an impact on the Council's recruitment of social care staff. She also spoke about the financial issues being encountered by some sponsors who were providing accommodation for those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine and enquired whether the Council had considered the provision of additional financial support to those individuals. In response, Councillor Wilson indicated that the government funding to the Council was generally directed towards the Ukrainian families themselves rather than to the sponsors.

Councillor Pardesi referred to the financial pressures around social care and indicated that increasing Council Tax or using funds from reserves was not a long-term solution to the problems. In response, Councillor Jessel indicated that the Council was working hard to support people to keep healthy and to stay in their own homes for as long as was possible, including through the recently introduced Enhanced Home Care Service. She also added that, in Staffordshire, there were very few delayed discharges from care. Councillor Parry added that the Council was not using its reserves to support social care but to address the pressures of inflation.

Councillor Alan White indicated that to resolve the issues around the funding for social care would require a national consensus on what needed to be done and how it could be achieved but, unfortunately, there was no such consensus.

Nexus Trading Services Limited – Annual Report 2021/22

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Councillor Winnington outlined the history of Nexus and how it had expanded to address gaps/failings in the social care market and to support the response to the Covid pandemic. He also paid tribute to the work and enthusiasm of the staff employed by the company.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins stated that the focus of reablement activity by Nexxus tended to be in the South and East of the county and she enquired as to whether there were plans to expand these services to include the north of the county. She also asked as to the measures being taken to recruit and retain staff. In response, Councillor Jessel indicated that the enhanced home care service services had its focus in the north of the county since it was there where it was most needed. She added that the service would be rolled out to other areas over time.

Councillor Hood and Councillor McMahon paid tribute to the contribution made by Nexxus and Councillor Hood gave an example of how staff went above and beyond what was required of them. She added that those working in the sector were undervalued and needed to be paid their worth. In response Councillor Deaville and Councillor Jessel indicated that the Council had increased the rate of pay for home care staff by 12% this year. Councillor Jessel also indicated that the Council was offering support to care home providers to assist them to modernise including through the better use of IT.

Final Recommendations for the Future Commissioning Arrangements for Supported Living Services in Staffordshire (Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Pardesi concerning what was meant by the “flexible use of staff within and between schemes”, Councillor Jessel indicated that this was about remodelling the service to allow staff to be utilised in a more flexible and efficient way.

High Needs Provision Capital Allocation Funding (Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Councillor Greatorex indicated that the MTFs Working Group had recently looked at the transportation costs in respect of SEND provision and how these costs could be reduced by increasing access to mainstream placements for children and young people with high needs (who might otherwise require more specialist provision). Councillor Loughborough-Rudd referred to the shortage of SEND places in his division.

In response, Councillor Price indicated that the Council was committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Family Hubs in Staffordshire (Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Afsar, Councillor Sutton spoke about the support available through the Family Hubs but added that there

was still more work to do. He also expressed his thanks to those staff working in the Children and Families Directorate.

Early Help Strategy 2022-2027

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Councillor Hewitt and Councillor Philip White expressed their support for the Strategy and commended the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People for his work and leadership in this area.

Recommissioning Domestic Abuse Services

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Loughborough-Rudd in respect of the funding for the service being on a rotational basis, Councillor Wilson indicated that by pooling the Council's resources with those of Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office, there was £670,450 per annum to support victims and families and also perpetrators across the whole of Staffordshire.

In response to a question from Councillor Hussain in relation to inflationary pressures and their impact on the service, Councillor Alan White indicated that the Council was awaiting its financial settlement from Central Government and once this was received the Council would have a clearer idea on how much was available to spend on domestic abuse services. He added that the level of spend was not necessarily a measure of success and that there were often innovated ways of running services more effectively and at lower cost.

Procurement of a Framework Agreement for the Supply and Installation of Windows and Doors

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Councillor Greatorex indicated that he was pleased to see that the Framework Agreement could also be accessed by public sector partners including schools. In response to a question from and Councillor Pardesi in relation to ensuring the quality of the products being procured, Councillor Deaville confirmed that the framework agreement provided for the procurement of products of good quality at the best value. He added that, where possible, local manufactures/suppliers were used in order to support the local economy.

Climate Change Action Plan and Climate Change Annual Report

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Councillor Tagg informed Members that the Council had seen a reduction of some 15% in its carbon emissions from 2019/20 to 2020/21. He added that

that the significant reduction in annual emissions was unlikely to be replicated going forward and future reporting was likely to show slower progress due to the nature of the challenge before the authority. He indicated that future activity included improvements to the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres and also a review of home to school transport.

He also explained that the Climate Change Action Plan revision 2, November 2022, detailed a list of actions which would assist the Council in reaching its ambition to become net carbon zero by 2050. The plan contained 33 actions across five areas which would be relevant until 2025 although it was proposed to review the Plan annually to ensure that it remained fit for purpose.

Councillor Tagg paid tribute to the Climate Change team and also reminded Members that the deadline for the submission of applications for funding under the Council's Climate Change Action Fund was 31 December.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins indicated that, in March 2022, the Staffordshire Sustainability Board committed to developing a base pledge with 10 commitments for action for formal approval and subsequent monitoring during 2022/23. She enquired as to what was the base pledge; what were the 10 commitments for action; where could Staffordshire residents read about these and the work of the Sustainability Board. She also enquired as to how much of the 43% reduction in the County's carbon emissions since 2019 was accounted for by a change in the methodology for waste management and schools moving off the balance sheet into academy status.

Councillor Hussain enquired as to how many trees had been planted in each of the eight districts across the County since 2019 and what improvements in air quality had been achieved as a result of this planting.

In response, Councillor Alan White indicated that he would ask Councillor Tagg to respond to Councillor Charlotte Atkins and Councillor Hussain in writing following the meeting.

Councillor Philips Atkins spoke about carbon generation in the agricultural sector through the use of fertilizers etc and the need to look for new methods of food production which were carbon neutral. Councillor Flunder outlined the climate change work ongoing in the Staffordshire Moorlands District; and Councillor Winnington spoke about how the Council was leading by example and also its commitment to work with partners in both the public and private sectors.

Councillor Jessel referred to the growth in the number of trees planted in the National Forrest over the last 20 years and Councillor Trowbridge invited Councillor Tagg to visit the Norbury Park Estate to see the tree planting

taking place there and the Chairman asked if the invitation could also be extended to him.

Here to Help

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Councillor Edgeller referred to suicide rates in Staffordshire, which were above the national average, and she asked members to reflect on those families who had lost a loved one at this time of year. She also praised the Council's work with the Samaritans to reach out to those struggling with mental health issues. Councillor Edgeller also reminded Members that Wednesday 21 December was the longest night of the year and that several council buildings, including the Shire Hall Gallery in Stafford, would be lit up green to remind residents in need that the Samaritans were there for them during their darkest hours, including over Christmas and New Year. She also asked Members to encourage their respective districts and local residents to participate in this campaign. Councillor Deaville, Councillor Loughborough-Rudd and Councillor McMahon extended their thanks to Councillor Edgeller for the work she was doing to highlight the importance of tackling mental health issues; and Councillor Loughborough-Rudd also commended the work of voluntary organisations across the County.

In response to a question from Councillor Loughborough-Rudd in respect of why the Household Support fund was targeted towards pensioners, Councillor Sutton indicated that Central Government had set out how the funding should be utilised, with a third being targeted to those of a pensionable age. He also extended his thanks to those members of staff who had been involved in the distribution of the funding.

Councillor Afsar spoke about the lack of food support services across parts of his Division and also the need to assist St Chad's Community Centre in finding funding for a replacement boiler. In response, Councillor Peters indicated that funding for the Centre may be available through the Community Regeneration Fund. Councillor Wilson added that she would welcome the opportunity to have a conversation with Councillor Afsar regarding funding for the Centre.

Councillor Hudson and Councillor Peters outlined some of the work being undertaken in East Staffordshire; and Councillor Smith spoke about the consequences of rising energy costs and the need for the Council to provide advice to residents on reducing energy usage.

Councillor Wileman commended Councillor Wilson and Councillor Sutton in relation to the distribution of Household Support Fund monies across the County.

Warmer Homes

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Councillor Northcott and Councillor Huckfield expressed their support for the Warmer Home initiative under which, over the next three years, the Council would receive a further £5.9m to install green home measures in people's homes, including solar panels, air source heat pumps, underfloor heating, loft insulation and external wall insulation.

Councillor Tagg spoke about how Warmer Homes funding had been utilised in the Newcastle-under-Lyme District.

All Businesses Great and Small

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Councillor Smith referred to the need for the Council's Business Development Team to "keep it simple" when providing advice to local businesses.

Councillor Philip White spoke about the new Shirehall Business Centre and the Council's other support for businesses which included extensive and easy to access advice.

Councillor Winnington also referred to the forthcoming work to rejuvenate the Market Square in Stafford.

HAF

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

Councillor Sutton spoke about the opportunities provide to schoolchildren under the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) which, during the Summer, offered 46,000 places (including 625 for those children with SEND).

Councillor Hood and Councillor Hewitt paid tribute to the success of the HAF programme. Councillor Hood did however express concern that some parents could not access the programme as they failed to meet the eligibility criteria despite being on low incomes and asked whether anything could be done to address this issue, especially as some children whose parents had reserved places did not turn up. In response, Councillor Alan White explained that he was also concerned about the high level of absenteeism and had asked Councillor Sutton to look into this issue. He also indicated that the eligibility criteria for places on the programme was set by Central Government but the Council was campaigning for more local discretion.

2022

(Paragraph 16 of the Statement)

On behalf of the Council, Councillor Alan White extended thanks for their hard work during 2022 to:

- Everybody working in care in Staffordshire, both internally in the council and the thousands working in care homes and providing domiciliary care in people's homes, helping the county's residents to enjoy their lives to the full.
- Those working in children's services, whether child protection social workers, educational psychologists, foster carers or the many other professionals involved in looking after children and giving them the best possible start in life.
- Everybody working in Staffordshire schools, whether teaching or providing such services as school meals.
- Those involved in repairing and maintaining Staffordshire's roads.
- Members and officers who had worked through what had been a difficult year, which came after a number of previous difficult years.

Councillor Jessel asked that her personal thanks be extended to those providing social care.

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

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

In response to a question from Councillor Pardesi concerning investment in human resources and the possible need for efficiency savings, Councillor Peters indicated that the Commissioner was recruiting additional officers and that there was no indication that "efficiency savings" would affect the availability of police officers and that any proposals brought forward by the Commissioner would be scrutinised by the Panel.

Resolved – That the report be received.

39. Questions

Councillor Pritchard asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

According to the most recent Air Quality Annual Status Report, at 5.3% Tamworth has the highest percentage of deaths attributable to airborne

particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter of 2.5µm or less (PM2.5) within Staffordshire for adults over 30.

Obviously, a transition to EV vehicles would greatly benefit residents living next to busy roads. Could the Leader of the Council outline to me what the authority is doing to reduce PM2.5 rates in the air, as well as drive the rollout of on-street EV charging points in Tamworth?

Reply

Promotion of active travel and undertaking work to tackle air pollution are fundamental roles of the Council's Connectivity Team. I am aware that a third bid for [Air Aware](#) funding to the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs has been submitted. If successful, the Council will continue the fantastic work of this initiative and collaboratively work with colleagues at Tamworth BC to promote campaigns to reduce the number of single person journeys and to support people to walk and cycle more.

I am also pleased to hear that through an Active Travel Fund, £343,000 has been allocated this financial year to deliver improvements for walking and cycling in Amington. In line with Staffordshire's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, proposals to deliver a School Street, wider footways and traffic management measures are proposed.

A public EV charging infrastructure strategy for Staffordshire is due to be presented to Cabinet in January for adoption. The Strategy offers a great opportunity to develop a network of charge points and encourage the uptake of EVs across the county. I recognise that for residents without the ability to charge EVs off-street, a number of alternative options to home charging will be important in enabling a transition to EV use. The Council has a key role to play, and through working together with Tamworth BC and local businesses, facilities at the rate and scale of delivery that the market requires will be rolled out. All these measures will contribute to the Council achieving carbon net zero by 2050 and improving the quality of life for residents through a reduction of noise and air quality impacts.

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

Question

Could the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture update this council please. What are Staffordshire County Council doing to support our Ukrainian sponsors and is there any direct funding available now or in the near future to assist them?

Reply

Hosts receive a nationally agreed thank you payment of £350 per host sponsor per month for the first year.

Further support is also provided to the Ukrainian guests for access to English, health support, enabling access to employment, ensuring that those needed help from Children's and Adults Social Care receive this.

A cabinet paper is making its way through in December. This paper seeks to secure a staffing team to ensure that Ukrainians arriving under the Homes for Ukraine scheme are supported to be happy, healthy, safe and being able to contribute to the place in which they live through work and being a part of their community.

The cabinet paper sets out how the local authority would like to use additional funding over the three years to provide:

- a. A staff team to provide outreach support to arrivals ensuring that their needs are met,
- b. Support for their mental health,
- c. A grant scheme for organisations to apply for to assist Ukrainian arrivals to become part of their community,
- d. Support to access online English classes and
- e. Access to a personalised budget to assist with urgent needs so that they can remain independent and resilient.

These areas for investment have been developed from the discussions we have been having with guests arriving in Staffordshire based on the most commonly identified needs and supporting the ambitions of the programme.

Supplementary Question

Will the Cabinet Member join me in thanking the sponsors who have helped out since the crisis in Ukraine emerged?

Reply

Yes, I am happy to echo those thanks to all the sponsors.

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 support does Staffordshire County Council give to designated Community Help Points to deliver the services listed on the County Council website?

Reply

There are 24 Community Help Points across Staffordshire including County Council managed libraries and other community sector organisations. We joined up with existing, trusted community settings to provide a non-digital alternative to accessing information and helping people to feel connected to their communities.

The Help Points signpost people to local activities and provide support in a variety of different ways. The scheme was launched in October 2020 and since then has received over 370 referrals, with the numbers of people seeking support, continuously growing.

As part of the County Council's Supportive Communities Programme, we offer the Help Points with access to training programmes, grant opportunities, promotional materials, and networking.

All Help Points will soon receive a bag of daily living equipment otherwise known as a 'Bag of Trix' enabling them to showcase what's available and invite people to 'try before they buy'.

Supplementary Question

Haregate Community Centre is run on a shoestring and will struggle to deliver the range of services listed on the Council's website. How will the Council support them?

Reply

Training is being provided for staff and volunteers but we do recognise that one model does not fit all and this is something we need to look at.

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

Question

Care staff and care packages prevent hospital admissions, minimise stays in hospital, free up beds and reduce ambulance waiting times.

In order to recruit and retain care staff, one of the easiest solutions is to offer staff better pay. Why is this not happening?

Reply

Adult social care is about so much more than reducing pressure on hospitals: it helps thousands of people with care and support needs in Staffordshire achieve a decent quality of life.

The sector employs around 22,000 staff in the county and like everywhere in England has been struggling with recruitment and retention. Most staff are satisfied with their jobs but have stressed the importance of ensuring adequate pay and benefits, training and progression, and recognition of their roles.

The vast majority of care staff are employed by independent companies who determine their own rates of pay. The Council increased fees in 2022/23: for home care by 12% and for care homes by an average of 6.24%. The Government has promised additional funding for adult social care in 2023/24 and we will review fees again when this is confirmed in order to recognise the rising cost of providing services.

The Council is also developing a strategy for a future care workforce in Staffordshire that describes how we will work with the sector and partners to sustain and grow the workforce.

Supplementary Question

When will this administration accept that we need urgent action in adult social care right now?

Reply

We are in constant contact with colleagues in the NHS, but it's not simply just about discharges and access to social care; there are relatively few people who are awaiting packages of care. We need a whole system approach; more funding for the NHS is not necessarily the solution. Layers of bureaucracy need to be eliminated; and the current situation in acute hospitals is a complex one which is due to a multiple of factors.

Councillor Afsar asked the following question of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

How much S106 funding has the East Staffordshire district generated for the county pot in the last five years? How much funding is still available for East Staffordshire from that pot, and what kind of programme or projects can be considered?

Reply

Thank you for your question about S106 contributions which come from planning gain right across the County Council working with our Planning Authority Partners.

I can confirm that the County Council has a very good track recorded in securing S106 monies for numerous needs including highway, education and environmental improvements.

This includes the Waterloo Street Local Highway Safety Scheme in your own division, which was completed in April this year, to address a pattern of personal injury accidents and was funded principally from s106 contributions.

The securing and allocation of section 106 monies is complex and involves many different areas of responsibility as well as all 8 of our Districts and Boroughs. Contributions received from specific developments sometimes address needs wider than individual planning authority boundaries.

Clearly local members have a role to ensure that relevant officers are informed of local needs in their respective divisions to ensure that opportunities are taken to seek developer contributions when appropriate.

Supplementary Question

The written response does not answer my question; can the Cabinet member provide me with some figures (going back two years if five years is a problem)?

Reply

The information is not collated in a way which would allow easy access to the figures you have requested but I would be delighted to draw the information together for you.

40. Petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

Chairman