

Cabinet

Wednesday 17 January 2024

10:00

Oak Room, County Buildings, Stafford

The meeting will be webcast live and archived for 12 months. It can be viewed at the following link: <https://staffordshire.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

John Tradewell
Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services
9 January 2024

Agenda

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Declarations of Interest in accordance with Standing Order 16**
- 3. Decision notice of the meeting held on 13 December 2023** (Pages 5 - 12)
- 4. Leader's Update**
Oral report of the Leader of the Council
- 5. Staffordshire Means Back to Business** (Verbal Report)
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills
- 6. Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation** (Pages 13 - 42)
Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change
- 7. Natural Environment Strategy** (Pages 43 - 76)
Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

8. **Here to Help - Progress Update** (Pages 77 - 106)

Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

9. **Service Provision of Temporary and Interim Staff Resources** (Pages 107 - 114)

Leader of the Council

10. **Ofsted Report** (To Follow)

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

11. **Forward Plan of Key Decisions** (Pages 115 - 122)

12. **Exclusion of the Public**

The Chairman to move:

“That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of Local Government Act 1972 indicated below”.

Part Two

(All reports in this section are exempt)

13. **Residential Overnight Education** (Pages 123 - 178)

(Exemption paragraph 3)

Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND)

14. **Drug and Alcohol Partnership Proposal** (Pages 179 - 196)

(Exemption paragraph 3)

Cabinet Member for Health and Care

15. Unregulated Placements

(Pages 197 - 202)

(Exemption paragraph 2)

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

16. Overview of a Child’s Complex Care Planning

(To Follow)

(Exemption paragraphs 1 and 2)

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Membership	
Alan White (Chair)	Jonathan Price
Philip White	Robert Pritchard
Mark Deaville	Mark Sutton
Julia Jessel	Simon Tagg
Paul Northcott	David Williams
Ian Parry	Victoria Wilson

Notes for Members of the Press and Public

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Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 13 December 2023

Attendance	
Mark Deaville	Alan White (Chairman)
Julia Jessel	Philip White
Jonathan Price	David Williams
Mark Sutton	Victoria Wilson
Simon Tagg	

Cabinet Support Members in attendance: Paul Northcott and Robert Pritchard.

Apologies: Ian Parry

Part One

60. Declarations of Interest in accordance with Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

61. Decision notice of the meeting held on 15 November 2023

Decision – That the notes of the meeting held on 15 November 2023 be approved.

62. Leader's Update

Decision – That the oral report of the Leader of the Council giving an update on a range of issues including the Network North transport conference in Birmingham where local authority partners spoke with “one voice” on the major benefits improvements to the A50/A500 corridor would bring (which has now been included in the projects listed under the Network North proposals); the gritting crews working tirelessly to keep Staffordshire on the move during the recent adverse weather; the news that many local councils were facing increased pressure and significant financial challenges and, despite these challenges, this Authority’s proposals to deliver a balanced budget and still invest in its key priorities; the “Here to Help” pages on the council website which provides support and advice on where to turn for those in need of help; the free school holiday activities available to eligible families; the Council teaming up with Staffordshire Samaritans to help those who struggle with their mental health over the festive period and the proposal to light the Shire Hall green and encouraging people to safely put green lights in their windows on Friday, 22 December (the longest night of the year); be noted.

The Leader also extended his thanks to all his county council colleagues, partners and residents who work tirelessly to support people and businesses across the county 365 days a year and wished them a peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year.

63. Staffordshire Means Back to Business - Oral Update

Decision – That the oral report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills giving an update on “Staffordshire Means Back to Business” activity including the following matters be noted:

- This month saw an increase of 340 claimants in Staffordshire. The total number of claimants in the county now stands at 15,030 or 2.8% of the working age population. The claimant count rate in Staffordshire continues to be one of the lowest in the West Midlands and is far lower than the average for the region of 4.9%, and lower than the average for England of 3.8%. We will continue to support those residents that unfortunately find themselves out of work to access employment through our partnership working and dedicated Jobs Brokerage service.
- The youth claimant count in Staffordshire saw an increase of 60 claimants to a total of 2,915 young people. The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit now stands at 4.7%. This is lower than the national rate of 5.1% and far lower than the regional rate of 6.9%. This further increase in the youth claimant count highlights the importance of continuing to engage with our younger residents and supporting them to find employment or continue in education and training.
- A few weeks ago, we learnt of the successful bid for £20m of Levelling Up Funding for parts of the Stafford Station Gateway project. Added to the previously successful bids, this now means that over £70m has been secured by the Staffordshire local authorities for the regeneration of our town centres from the Levelling Up Fund alone, with over £220 million national funding secured in total which the County Council continues to work proactively with our District and Borough Council partners to deliver. Stafford Station Gateway is of course an important piece of the town’s ongoing revitalisation which includes the County Council’s Eastgate regeneration plans and the Borough Council’s Future High Street programme.
- i54 South Staffordshire is one of flagship employment sites and the County Council, working with South Staffordshire Council and the City of Wolverhampton Council, have been working together

to unlock the western extension to the site. Back in the summer it was announced that Fortune Brands would be building a 270,000 sq ft manufacturing centre of excellence on the western extension to support the group's luxury ceramics and brassware brands within the kitchen and bathroom industry. This development is expected to be completed shortly with recruitment for the 300 expected jobs having recently begun.

- The visitor economy is one of Staffordshire's key strengths and we continue to support the development of this vital part of the county's economy. Back in June I updated Cabinet on our efforts to secure a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent as part of VisitEngland's national reform of Destination Management Organisations. This programme is expected to create around 40 strategic partnerships across the country which will work in collaboration locally, regionally and nationally on shared priorities and targets to support and grow the visitor economy. Importantly, the LVEP has the potential to bring significant benefits to the county, including through access to support and future funding programmes. We have recently received the news that our efforts to secure a LVEP have been successful. Over the coming months we'll be undertaking a substantial amount of work to establish the LVEP and ensuring that it is a success.
- Linked to this and as we are now in the run up to Christmas, I finally need to mention our marketing campaign to highlight the many events that are taking place across the county for people to enjoy. Many of these have been taking place over the last few weeks, although there are still plenty of activities and events planned and I'd therefore encourage everybody to fully enjoy the festivities and have a very happy Christmas.

64. Older People Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy 2024-2029



"We want to ensure that older people in our county are able to live healthy and well, and maintain their independence for as long as they can.

Our new Older People Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy, which has been produced with local organisations, older people and their carers, aims to help everyone live independently at home for as long as possible.



It will also ensure that, as and when they do require support, they are able to access the best

	<p>support available to meet their needs.”</p> <p>Julia Jessel, Cabinet Member for Health and Care</p>
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Reasons for the Decision – To consider the proposed Older People Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy 2024-2029.

Decision – That the proposed Older People Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy 2024-29 be approved.

65. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2029

	<p>“Next year we will spend millions of pounds in Staffordshire: backing communities, supporting residents, delivering infrastructure and investing in business.</p> <p>At a time when two-thirds of our budget is allocated to the provision of care and helping those who need a hand, I am proud that this council is also able to simultaneously sow the seeds for the future so that Staffordshire remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.”</p>
	<p>Alan White, Leader of the Council</p> <p>“Despite rising costs and increasing demand for services putting all councils under financial pressure, a combination of forward-thinking, planned service reform and attention to detail means we continue to invest in services while delivering a balanced budget.</p> <p>Like everyone, we have to make ends meet and we will work with partners to make the most of every pound we spend on behalf of our communities.”</p> <p>Ian Parry, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources</p>

Reasons for the Decision – To update Cabinet on the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2024 to 2029.

Decision – (a) That the updates to the financial plans, as set out in the report, including the potential use of reserves to balance the MTFs period and risks associated with that, be noted.

(b) That the new savings as well as the commitment to continue to deliver the previously approved cost reductions, as set out in Appendices 2a – 2e to the report, be endorsed.

(c) That a further report be received in January to recommend a Revenue Budget, MTFS and Council Tax to full council in February.

(d) That the Corporate Review Committee be asked to scrutinise the proposed pressures and cost reduction options against the principles of a good and balanced budget.

66. Decisions taken by Cabinet Members under Delegated Powers

Decision – That the following decisions taken by Cabinet Members under delegated powers be noted:

Cabinet Member	Decision
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People	<p>(i) In approving the extension of contract IA1632 “Improving the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people in Staffordshire”, as per the Contract Particulars, for 12 months from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 (final year). The contract will end 31 March 2025.</p> <p>(ii) In approving the utilisation of funding from SCC public health ring fenced reserves to meet inflationary pressures and maintain service levels in the final year of the contract (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025).</p>

67. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

Subject Matter	Contact
Homes for Children in Our Care	Name: Natasha Moody Tel: 07976 191079
Residential Overnight Education	Name: Neelam Bhardwaja Tel: (01785) 277041
Service Provision of Temporary and Interim Human Resources	Name: Sarah Getley Tel: (01785) 854265
Here to Help – Progress Update	Name: Catherine Mann Tel: (01785) 278320
Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation	Name: Deborah Breedon Tel: (01785) 276061
Natural Environment Strategy	Name: Catherine Mann Tel: (01785) 278320

Unregulated Placements	Name: Nisha Gupta Tel: 07890 402088
Drug and Alcohol Services	Name: Claire McIver Tel: 07929 756384
Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2029	Name: Rachel Spain Tel: (01785) 854455
Apprenticeship Levy	Name: Anthony Baines Tel: (01785) 895984
Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 3, 2023/24	Name: Rachel Spain/ Wendy Tompson Tel: (01785) 854455/ (01785) 854267
Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion - progress update	Name: Sarah Getley Tel: (01785) 854265
Lighting and ITS energy contract procurement proposal	Name: James Bailey Tel: (01785) 276591
Civil Contingencies Policy & Business Continuity Management Policy	Name: Tracy Thorley Tel: (01785) 276337
Joint Enterprise Legacy Committee	Name: Anthony Hodge Tel: (01785) 277204
Burton Regeneration	Name: Ian Turner Tel: (01785) 277228
Capital Programme for Schools 2024/ 25	Name: Ian Turner Tel: (01785) 277228
Section 75 Agreement for the provision of Adult Social Care Assessment and Case Management	Name: Amanda Stringer Tel: (01785) 895170
Recommissioning of Residential and Nursing Care Homes	Name: Andrew Jepps Tel: (01785) 278557
Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service	Name: Natasha Moody Tel: 07976 191079
Unregulated Placement Update	Name: Nisha Gupta Tel: 07890 402088

68. Exclusion of the Public

“That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below”.

PART TWO

69. Families Health & Wellbeing (0-19) Service (Exemption paragraph 3)

Reasons for the Decision – To consider the arrangements for the future

provision of the Families Health and Well-being Service.

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

70. Drug and Alcohol Partnership Proposal

(Exemption paragraph 3)

Reasons for the Decision – To consider the arrangement for the future provision of drug and alcohol treatment services in Staffordshire.

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

Alan White
Leader of the Council

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 January 2024

Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

Report of the Climate Change Working Group on behalf of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Simon Tagg, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

“Although this authority has taken steps towards its target of reaching net zero by 2050 by cutting carbon emissions by 50 per cent since 2019, there is still more to be done.

This working party report suggests possible ways that the Council can meet its commitment to the environment and support Staffordshire’s economy, while also enhancing the county’s quality of life.

At this stage we are being asked to consider the report and respond in due course.”

Report Summary:

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Climate Change Working Group to investigate carbon capture and offsetting residual carbon in Staffordshire County Council to meet its Climate Change commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050.

The Working Group gathered evidence from a range of sources during its review and presents a report (Appendix 1) to summarise what it found, what needs to be done and six recommendations to consider how to offset residual carbon through carbon sequestration and woodland creation in Staffordshire.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the report on 6 November 2023 and referred it to Cabinet to receive the report and to request Cabinet to consider the content and prepare an executive response to the six recommendations in the report within two months of its receipt.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Receive the report of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Climate Change Working Group on Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation.
- b. Provide an executive response to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the recommendation(s) of the Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation report (Appendix 1) within two months of receipt of the report.

Cabinet – Wednesday 17 January 2024

Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

Report of the Climate Change Working Group on behalf of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Receive the report of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Climate Change Working Group on Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation.
- b. Provide an executive response to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the recommendation(s) of the Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation report within two months of receipt of the report.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Climate Change Working Group on behalf of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. The Climate Change Working Group focussed on carbon capture and offsetting residual carbon in Staffordshire County Council. The Council is required to remove as much carbon from the atmosphere as it emits. The Council's Climate Change Action Plan shows that the Council is working well to reduce its carbon emissions, but we found that there would still be a need to offset 7,000-10,000 tonnes of residual carbon to balance its carbon emissions by 2050. The working group focussed on what more could be done to achieve this.
2. The Working Group found that carbon capture and storage through technology was not an option at this time and identified that the sustainable way to capture carbon emissions is to plant and grow trees and to store carbon in trees and wood.
3. The Working Group gathered evidence from Council officers, the Forestry Commission, The National Forest Company, Norbury Park Estate and Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFOR).

4. Members visited Norbury Park Estate and the BIFOR free air carbon dioxide enrichment experiment to see woodland management in action and the experiment to investigate tree health and the impact of climate change on trees and woodland.
5. The Working Group identified that carbon sequestration could not be looked at in isolation amidst a dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity. There were many benefits of new woodland for Climate Change and Nature recovery including: Carbon sequestration, reduced emission, air quality improvements, climate resilience, temperature resilience, soil health, recreational health and education, and economic benefits.
6. Members determined to broaden their approach and consider how to join up some of the individual strands of work in Staffordshire to make advantage of the benefits of woodland. Members considered what is working well, the County Council rural portfolio and the wider benefits of woodland creation.
7. Members understood that woodlands can also bring multiple sustainable benefits (social, environmental, and economic) and the Forestry Commission identified funding and support to develop a plan and actively manage woodlands using the UK Forestry Standard.
8. The report (Appendix 1) provides a summary of the evidence gathered by the Working Group relating to carbon sequestration and woodland creation, the conclusions and recommendations are presented to Cabinet for information and further investigation as a positive step forward to meet the council's commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050.
9. The recommendations in the report are bold and ambitious, to plan a concept forest that will help deliver our commitments for climate change and nature, improve our environment, develop the green economy and enhance green skills plus many more benefits for the residents of Staffordshire. The challenge is to plan for action and commit to a greener future.

Legal Implications

10. Climate Change Act 2008, amendment (May 2019), requiring the country to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050. England Trees Action Plan 2021 to 2024, increase tree and woodland cover requirements.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

11. Forestry Commission Funding has been identified for the planning, funding, establishing, growing and management of Woodland and is available until March 2024. The details of further resource impacts / implications have not yet been identified but will be reported in future reports to Cabinet.

Climate Change Implications

12. One of the key priorities in the Staffordshire County Council Strategic Plan is to tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable.

13. In the absence of engineered long term carbon storage, carbon sequestration by natural means seems to be the only option available to the Council in the near future to mitigate its residual carbon emissions.

14. If a "Staffordshire Forest" is not established by 2030 as part of our climate change mitigation, it will be too late to sequester the amount of carbon we need to annually by our 2050 target.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

[Climate change - Staffordshire County Council](#)

Appendix 1 – Climate Change Working Group report – Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

Contact Details

Director: John Tradewell, Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services

Report Author: Deb Breedon
Job Title: Scrutiny and Support Manager

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Climate Change Working Group

Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation for Net Zero

October 2023



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Chairman's Foreword

There is no quick fix for climate change, it is a global problem that has been hundreds of years in the making, and everyone must play their part to slow it down.

We want Staffordshire County Council to be leading and encouraging our residents and businesses to do what they can to reduce carbon emissions.

SCC has committed to reach net zero by 2050, in doing this SCC also aims to enhance the quality of life and well-being for our residents and provide a sustainable economy for business.

We found that the Staffordshire County Council is working on a range of initiatives and projects to reduce carbon emissions. The Council is making good progress and has reduced our carbon emissions by 43% since declaring a climate emergency in 2019.

Our focus was to look at carbon capture and carbon sequestration, taking residual carbon emissions that will not be able to be reduced and to look at solutions to mitigate these emissions.

We recognised that we needed to look to the future and widen our focus to the dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity and to follow our priority in the Corporate Plan to tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable.

We feel that the recommendations arising from our report about carbon sequestration and woodland creation will support the action plan and is a positive step forward to meet the council's commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050.

I thank all the officials who administered the process and to Council officers and expert witnesses from the Forestry Commission, the National Forest Company and Norbury Park Estate, who provided comprehensive evidence to inform our work, they all played a large part in achieving this report.

Finally, I thank elected members for their enthusiasm, support, and insightful enquiries throughout the review and take great pleasure in presenting our findings and recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change to take forward.

Councillor Samantha Thompson

Chairperson of the Climate Change Working Group

Members of the Working Group



Councillor Samantha Thompson (Chair)



Councillor Tina Clements



Councillor Jeremy Pert



Councillor Bernard Peters



Councillor David Smith



Councillor Conor Wileman



Councillor Nigel Yates

Executive Summary

Staffordshire County Council is tackling climate change by reducing its carbon emissions, with an aim to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 across every aspect of our service provision and estate. We have already reduced 43% of our carbon emissions since declaring a climate change emergency in July 2019.

Our working group considered how the Council is tackling climate change and we initially considered a wide range of topics as potential focus for our work and considered areas of the climate change action plan that needed more attention. We found that in order for the Council to meet its 2050 commitment, the Council would need to balance carbon reduction with carbon sequestration to mitigate the residual carbon emissions.

We started to look at what the Council does now and what more could be done. We found that technology was not yet affordable or available to capture and store carbon, but trees naturally take carbon from the atmosphere and store it, therefore the Council could achieve its 2050 commitment by planting 2.5 million trees by 2030.

It takes approximately 20-25 years of growth for a tree to be able to sequester carbon in large quantities, depending on tree species and other factors, and so the window for planting is now. When trees are felled, the carbon remains in the wood. When wood is burnt the carbon is released and therefore the sequestration is lost.

We considered where, what, and how to plant the number of trees required and sought advice from Council officers, the Forestry Commission, Norbury Estate and National Forest Company.

We identified that carbon sequestration could not be looked at in isolation, there is a dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity, and we broadened our approach to consider how to join up some of the individual strands of work in Staffordshire. We looked at what is working well, and we looked at the rural portfolio and benefits of woodland creation.

We understood that woodlands can bring multiple sustainable benefits (social, environmental, and economic) and identified funding and support to develop a plan and actively manage woodlands using the UK Forestry Standard.

We welcomed the visit to Norbury Park Estate. Seeing how the estate was pushing boundaries and providing a vision for what was possible, providing insight into species of trees, managing woodlands, innovative farming, planting herbal leys to reduce use of fertilisers and increase biodiversity was enlightening.

The Forestry Commission evidence opened a new dimension for consideration when planting trees, to consider the multifaceted benefits of woodland creation. We also identified available funding and support to access funding to plant, create, grow, and manage woodland and the legislative tree cover targets which will require the UK to plant more trees.

We understood that changing climate and disease may impact on some species of trees which may fail and there is a need to plant and maintain in the short, medium and long term and funding is currently available to do this.

We welcomed the presentation from the National Forest Company, the National Forest provided an opportunity to see what was possible and proven to be successful. Over 28 years the National Forest (which included woodlands and towns), had added value to the local economy, increased tourism, created 5000 jobs and planted 9.5 million trees. Increased nature, wellbeing, and sequestered many tonnes of carbon.

We considered Staffordshire County Council's existing rural portfolio which consists of country parks, county farms, regenerations sites, landfill sites, maintained schools and corporate property and considered how and where to plant trees and woodlands, we also considered what more could be done to work with County farms and how to improve the capacity for carbon sequestration and soil health and considered the potential benefits of using herbal leys.

We found the evidence gathered through our work enlightening and we believe that the best practice and expert advice given provides an achievable and sustainable way forward which links with real industry leaders and can be transformative in wider terms in Staffordshire.

Trees are the key to unlock our path to net zero, and there is a need to push forward with tree planting. Rather than looking at this in isolation we consider transformation of the area by creating multi-purpose woodlands and creating a concept forest with a pilot of farming, mixed economy, and tourism in Staffordshire.

We have identified an ambitious way forward for Cabinet to work towards, which will meet our net zero commitment and the wider outcomes and priorities of our Corporate Plan to look to support Staffordshire's economy to grow, generating more and better-paid jobs and tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable.

Evidence Gathering

Climate Change Vision

'Staffordshire County Council will achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. In doing this, we will enhance the quality of life and well-being for our residents and provide a sustainable economy for business.'

We recognise the importance of climate change and its impact on the residents and businesses of Staffordshire. We have more to do and our strategic plan highlights climate change as one of the key principles. We have pledged to "Tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable."

We are one of 48 Councils appointed nationally under the Environment Act 2021 to lead the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). In February 2022 we made a nature recovery declaration, recognising the crisis facing our wild habitats and species and marking its commitment to securing their recovery.

Climate Change action across Staffordshire

As a response to local authorities in Staffordshire announcing climate emergencies the Staffordshire Sustainability Board was created in January 2022.

It brings together Elected Members (Sustainability and Climate Change Portfolio Holders) from the councils in Staffordshire to allow discussion on relevant environmental and sustainability issues, debate matters affecting multiple authorities and decide outcomes and objectives for collaborative projects. It facilitates a collaborative forum, to work together, to influence change and to encourage organisations and individuals to ensure Staffordshire is net carbon zero by 2050.

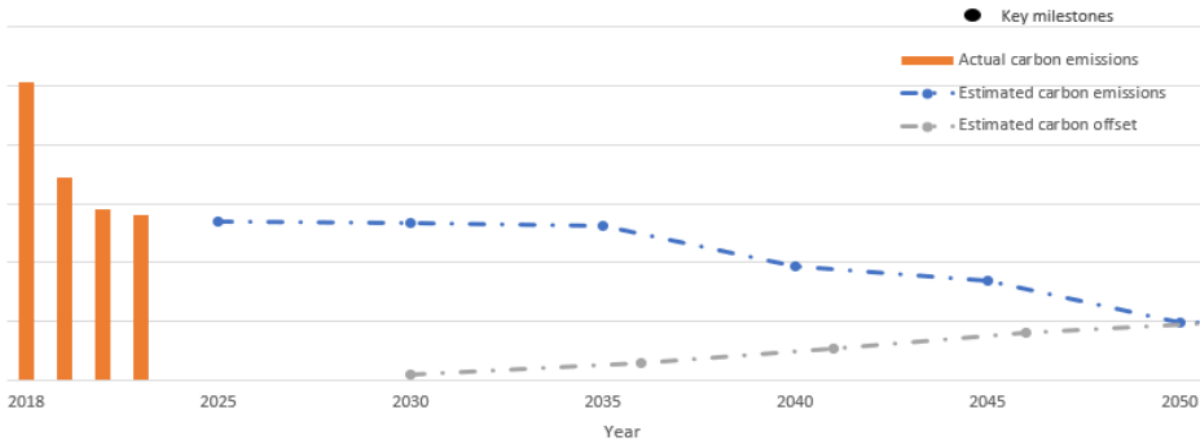
In January 2023, the Board joined with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Waste Management Board to improve effectiveness and efficiency of directing and monitoring on the sustainability agenda.

Borough and District Councils have the remit for delivering a wide range of services housing, planning, household waste collection, etc., and each Council has its own climate change action plan, looking at what is needed and how to do things differently to mitigate the impact of climate change, educate people about climate change and the positive impact they can each make if they start to change their carbon footprint.

Staffordshire Roadmap to Zero 2050

The Strategic Development Framework and Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) details work and projects to reduce carbon emissions as much as possible.

Programme Roadmap:



There are five themes in the CCAP 1: Carbon Reduction 2: Air Quality 3: Natural Environment 4: Waste 5: Behavioural Change.

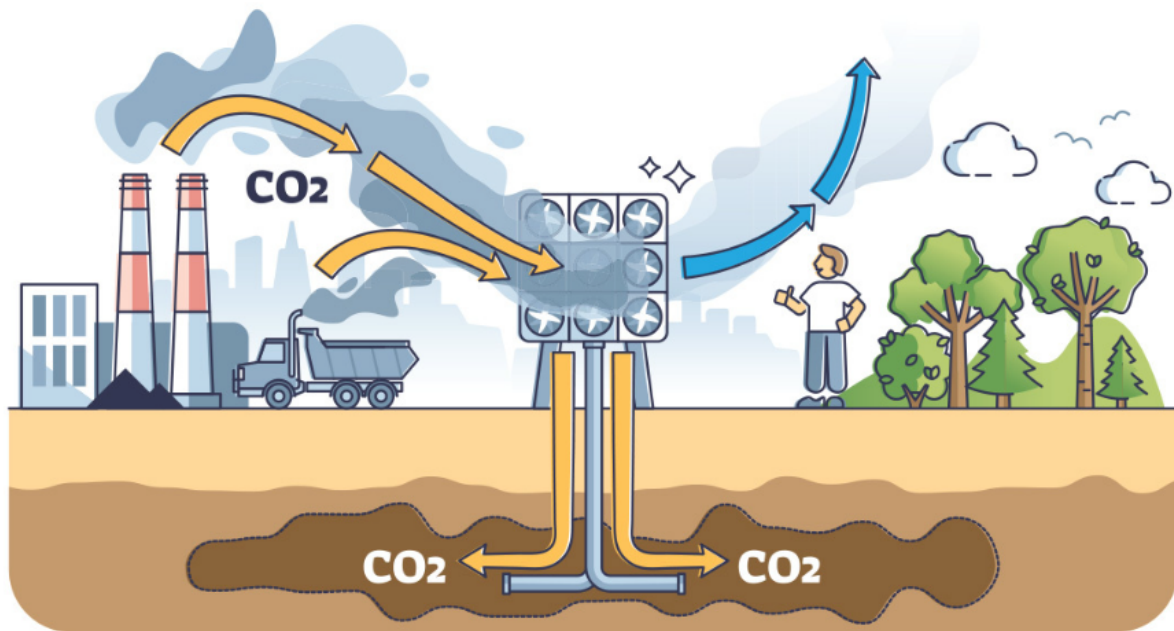
Each of the five themes have actions which will help SCC reach net zero by 2050. The initial years of the five-year action plan place significant focus on gathering and evaluating data to make sure we make the best use of public resources when implementing carbon reduction initiatives, this lays the foundation to make the changes needed. The action plan details work planned and already happening across SCC and the range of initiatives and projects being rolled out to reduce the Councils carbon footprint. Progress of actions is monitored and regularly reported.

The working group considered wider climate change concerns, the impact of weather, food supply, flooding and how SCC could use its resources to offset the residual carbon by bringing together elements of the natural environment - biodiversity and planting trees. To reach net zero by 2050 our focus is carbon reduction, carbon capture and carbon sequestration.

Carbon reduction CR-03	Research carbon sequestration and other potential offsetting projects. Outline options and make recommendations for sequestration and/or offset projects.
Natural Environment NE-01	Commission a study to determine the current sequestration / storage of carbon in natural habitats on SCC landholdings and the potential to increase it through tree planting and habitat enhancement.
Natural Environment NE-02:	Review policies that impact on our management of habitats.

Carbon Capture Options

CARBON CAPTURE



Climate change gases which are emitted go to the atmosphere and contribute to climate change. We considered if the technology currently available to capture and store carbon is an option but found that it is currently expensive and not yet reliable to store carbon long term.

The sustainable way to capture carbon emissions is to plant and grow trees and to store carbon in trees and wood. Burning wood releases carbon back into the air therefore we should use timber to build.

Tree planting considerations

We found that there is a 25–30-year window to plant 2.5 million trees to sequester 10,000 tonnes of carbon annually to offset our residual emissions. This figure may vary, but we recognise the timeframe and need to start planting in Staffordshire.

We identified planting model(s):

Coniferous based model with biodiversity enhancement, through broadleaved planting and open spaces

Broadleaved based model with open spaces

Biodiversity led model focusing purely on habitat enhancement as primary objective.

Further considerations to be factored into planting:

- Which species - fast growing
- How to plant - density of planting
- Threat of plant pathogens - species diversity

- d. The purpose of planting - carbon capture or commercial forestry
- e. Re-look at what type of trees to plant as climate changes occur.

The Forestry Commission, Norbury Estate and National Forest Company all advise planting a mix of species. Broadleaf or conifer, we established that there is gradation of options and variables to try depending on what they are being grown for. Commercial timber providers grow a tree species for a purpose, this commercial forestry provides timber for a range of purposes and the carbon remains stored in the timber. Some decisions about which trees need to be planted is based on the site or on the soil type, this decision is made on a case-by-case basis and is made by the landowner – this can be Council or privately owned land.

Tree cover legislation

- a. Current England woodland cover: 10.2% (1,323 kha)
- b. Tree cover outside woodland: 4.3% (565 kha)
- c. Tree canopy and woodland cover: 14.5% (1,888 kha)
- d. Target: 16.5% (2,149 kha) or 261 kha additional tree and woodland cover – an area the size of Cheshire.
- e. Staffordshire accounts for c.2% of England. If Staffordshire were to play our part this would account for 5,220ha.
- f. Roughly 200 hectares of woodland creation, per year until 2050.
- g. Current rates are less than 20 hectares per annum.

What does this mean over the next few years?

Interim target: increase the tree canopy and woodland cover by 0.26% of land area (equivalent to 34,000 hectares) by January 2028.

This will require 7,500 ha per year by 2025 rising to 10,300 ha per year of woodland creation and agroforestry combined from 2035 to 2050. The assumed split is 7,500 ha of conventional woodland per year from 2025 rising to 9,000 ha per year from 2035 to 2050.

Woodland planting and management

Recognising the enormity of the task ahead to meet the Council's offsetting target and tree and woodland cover target, we identified the need to explore more about tree planting, species planting, growth, and management of woodlands.

We had also identified a wider scope:

- a. the need to look at the wider picture and link tree planting with other work in Staffordshire including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Staffordshire

and Stoke-on-Trent which sets out priorities identified to drive a coordinated action plan to support the recovery of natural habitats and species.

- b. the need to utilise SCC rural portfolio which includes country parks, County farms, regeneration sites, landfill sites, maintained schools and corporate property where more trees could be planted.
- c. to consider how to make better use of all of the land we have, such as rural, parcels of land, verges, derelict land, and county farms.
- d. the need to look at the wider benefits of developing a multi-purpose forest. Which includes - Landscape enhancement; Habitat creation (woodland edge); Health agenda; Recreation; Education; Tourism; Timber production; Rural employment.

We identified the Norbury Park Estate in Staffordshire as a site of good practice to visit and invited the Forestry Commission and the National Forest Company to provide expert witness accounts.

Norbury Park Estate Site Visit

We visited Norbury Estate to witness how they had achieved to transform the Estate and offset carbon emissions in just over a decade. They achieved this through:

- a. A woodland planting programme.
- b. Improved woodland management
- c. Creation of a sustainable timber processing business
- d. Conversion of intensively farmed arable land to grassland and herbal leys
- e. A significant investment in renewable energy.

Woodland Creation

- a. Since 2009 a total of 400 acres of new woodland have been planted predominantly with native broadleaf species with the aim that oak would dominate after 100 years.
- b. In 2012 a 60-acre Diamond Wood was planted at Ranton Abbey as part of the Woodland Trust's Diamond Jubilee Woods scheme to celebrate Her Majesty's Jubilee. The young plantation comprises an innovative mix of 60 species planted with resilience to climate change in mind. The plantation was highly commended by the Royal Forestry Society in 2014 in its Woodlands for Climate Change Awards.

Woodland Management

- a. The estate includes 350 acres of mature woodland predominantly of oak planted c140 years ago. A programme of active management was started, and in 2017 the European halo thinning approach was adopted.
- b. c2,000 tonnes of timber are being harvested each year, most of which is processed at the estate's new sawmill. Boards, beams, and cladding are air-dried in a traditional way and kiln finished. Timber of lesser quality is cut into firewood logs or chipped for fuel. The timber processing business is almost entirely powered by electricity generated by 100Kw of solar photo-voltaic panels. Heating for the kiln and for the main house and barns is provided by two wood chip boilers.
- c. The estate employs seven forestry staff under a Head Forester.

Agricultural Land

- a. The estate includes c700 acres of agricultural land comprising arable, pasture and permanent pasture.
- b. On the expiry of existing tenancies all arable land has been laid to grass and licensed to local dairy and stock farmers. In 2018 the decision was taken to improve the capacity for carbon sequestration and soil health by adding herbal leys and this model will be rolled out to all agricultural land using a minimum tillage method over the next few years.

Research

- a. In 2013 Prof Bradwell and Dr Scott (through their family charitable Foundation – The JABBS Foundation) donated £15m to the University of Birmingham to establish the Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFOR) to investigate tree health and the impact of climate change on trees and woodland. The BIFOR Free Air Carbon Dioxide Enrichment experiment is located in Mill Haft, one of the estate's mature oak woodlands.
- b. In 2018 The JABBS Foundation made a further grant of £500,000 to the University of Birmingham in support of the Action Oak initiative to research the response mechanisms of oak trees to pests and diseases.
- c. An 11-acre field is the location for an experiment looking at soil recovery after a period of intensive agriculture.

The owners had also funded a series of research projects including the BIFOR (Birmingham Institute of Forest Research) project.

Visit to BIFOR – Research Facility

BIFOR is the focus of education and community work, but the estate also works with the local schools, hosts the RFS Teaching Trees scheme and visits from inner city schools with the Country Trust. The Ranton Diamond Wood is open each year and in 2017 on the 5th anniversary of the planting hosted a community open day with the Woodland Trust on the theme of woodland and the environment.

The profile of the estate in the wider forestry community is increasing through involvement in wider industry initiatives such as Action Oak. In 2018 Professor Bradwell was awarded the Peter Savill Award by Woodland Heritage and the Sylva Award by the Royal Forestry Society in recognition of his outstanding contribution to UK forestry.

Forestry Commission Evidence Session

We welcomed evidence from the Forestry Commission which provided the current national inventory of woodlands and trees distribution in Staffordshire by interpreted forest type.

The evidence highlighted the dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity issues. As trees grow, they take carbon dioxide out of the air and store carbon in the tree and roots. The roots, help stabilise the ground and prevent flooding, and the ground and trees create places for insects and animals to live which helps biodiversity. Woodlands and trees also deliver social space at the same time as social wellbeing space.

The holistic benefits of woodland creation include:

Restored landscape	Soil stabilisation	Carbon capture
Reduced pollution	Improved air quality	Increased biodiversity
Health and Wellbeing	Timber and woodland	Food source for pollinators
Flood alleviation	Recreation	Enhanced water quality
Dappled shade keeping rivers cool	Sheltered crops and livestock	Reduced soil and nutrient loss

Legislation supports nature recovery and in Staffordshire we have the Staffordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy which aims to broker the best solution and outcome in our wild habitats and species and marks its commitment to securing their recovery. When carefully planned taking account of the UK Forestry Standard process, and when actively managed, woodlands provide multiple sustainable benefits (social, environmental, and economic). This will support the recovery of natural habitats and species, and the legislation supports nature recovery.

We had identified that the statutory target for tree canopy and woodland cover in England is to increase from 14.5% to 16.5% of land area by 2050. The 261,000 hectares of woodland are to be proportionately spread across England. The Staffordshire share of that was unknown at this time.

This target aims to support the delivery of net zero emissions and contribute to other outcomes such as habitat restoration and flood regulation. This target sits alongside 12 other targets. Successive Governments have been responsible for actioning the targets.

Benefits of New Woodlands	Climate Change	Nature Recovery
Carbon sequestration	New woodlands absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis, helping to mitigate climate change by reducing atmospheric CO2 levels.	Woodlands provide habitat and food sources for various wildlife, supporting biodiversity and enhancing ecosystem health.
Reduced emission	New woodlands can act as carbon sinks, offsetting	Woodlands create corridors and habitats for native

	emissions from human activities like transportation and industry.	species, aiding in their migration and survival.
Air quality improvements	Trees in woodlands filter pollutants from the air, improving air quality in surrounding areas.	Woodlands help filter and purify water, improving water quality and benefiting aquatic ecosystems.
Climate resilience	Woodlands enhance landscape resilience by reducing the risk of erosion, landslides, and flooding.	Biodiverse woodlands are more resilient to pests and diseases, reducing the need for chemical interventions.
Temperature resilience	Woodlands provide shade and cooling effects, helping to mitigate the urban heat island effect.	Woodlands create microclimates that support a variety of plant and animal species, fostering resilience in ecosystems.
Soil health	Tree roots enhance soil structure, fertility, and nutrient cycling, promoting healthy soils.	Decomposing leaves and organic matter from woodlands enrich the soil, supporting diverse plant life.
Recreational health and education	Woodlands offer recreational and wellbeing opportunities & serve as educational resources for people to learn about nature and climate.	Woodlands provide natural spaces for people to connect with and appreciate wildlife and ecosystems.
Economic benefits	Sustainable forestry and woodland management can provide livelihoods and economic benefits to local communities.	Ecotourism, forest products, and sustainable timber can generate income and employment opportunities.

The Working Group found that multi-purpose forestry holds a range of benefits – landscape enhancement, habitat creation, health agenda, recreation, education, tourism, timber production, rural employment, and carbon sequestration.

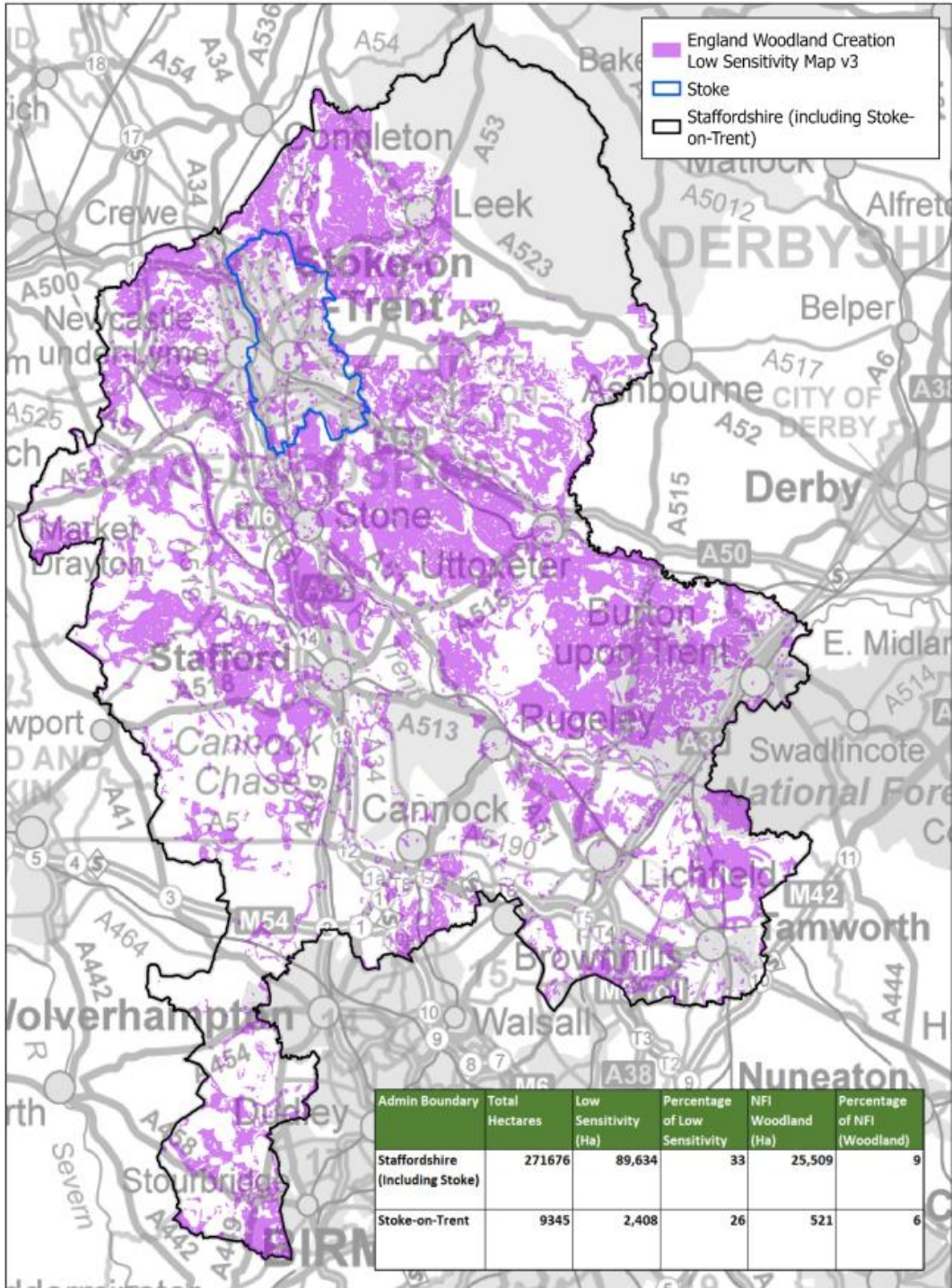
Other factors to be considered:

- a. Biomass renewable energy source – woodlands need to be sustainable, burning wood releases carbon into the air.
- b. Build with wood, carbon is embedded in the building.
- c. Need to manage the woodlands.
- d. Have a range of woodlands – some take longer due to tree growth rate (e.g., Oak).
- e. Plant a mixture of species not more than 70% one species – must conform to Forestry Commission Standard.
- f. Employment opportunity - Forestry Commission staff are all paid staff, roles are in demand, recent woodland development jobs advertised had over 800 applied for apprenticeships (22k salary).

- g. The biggest challenge is inertia about bringing land to a permanent land change status.
- h. Must commit to change, have land availability, and build capacity in the sector, must have people to manage woodlands, maintain at the right time of the year and compete for land.
- i. The Government offer is good, but we must decide proportionally what to do and plan. The Government land use strategy requires the landowners to determine land usage or woodland development. The Government lead target for Staffordshire in 2025 is 7,500 increasing to 10,000 by 2050. To achieve this, we need to also plant trees outside of the woodland. The Fund offers assistance for woodland planting plus individual trees.
- j. Sussex has 20% woodlands and still has farming.

Staffordshire has scope for planting woodland, the Forestry Commission provided a map which demonstrates locations for woodland creation and avoiding sensitivities.

Forestry Commission England Woodland Creation Low Sensitivity Map v3.0 - Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent



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We found the map of locations (highlighted in 'purple') showing land at the lowest level of sensitivity to plant and create woodlands in Staffordshire was particularly useful to see where to go first. Member were keen to share this information with District and

Borough colleagues. It highlighted the need to use the land in Staffordshire effectively moving forward. The land highlighted could be used for woodland or building and it was considered that the highest priority land (grade 2 agricultural land), should be for food production, rather than use best quality land to build on.

Forestry Commission funding is available until March 2025. Financial assistance and advice to plan, fund, establish, grow, and manage woodlands.

There are a number of grants available:

- a. Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- b. England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO)
- c. Woodland Carbon Code
- d. Woodland Carbon Guarantee
- e. Woodland Management Grant

The Forestry Commission have offered to explore with any land the Council would like to plant trees on.

National Forest Company – evidence session

The National Forest is right in the heart of the country, embracing 200 square miles of the Midlands. It spans across parts of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire and aims to link the two ancient Forests of Charnwood and Needwood. With a history of coal mining and heavy industry, the landscape is now that of rolling farmland, ancient forests, and new planted woodlands. Its main towns and villages include Burton upon Trent, Coalville and Swadlincote and the historic town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

The National Forest was set up by DEFRA, bids were submitted to transform the area. In this area mines had been closed, there was a need to landscape and a huge amount of regeneration and restoration. The National Forest Company manages the National Forest. There are 40 employees, it covers 6 Borough and District Councils and two County Councils. The NFC works with Staffordshire on local nature recovery, Enjoy Staffordshire, etc.

The Values of the NFC include tackling Climate Change and sustainability, and has confidence that trees transform things and that the National Forest is for everyone. The NFC enables organisations, it works with people, it does not do the work for them but leads, enables, inspires, invests, advises, demonstrates, and promotes. It is a vital role to emphasise the wider benefits of tree planting. It is not just about the trees; NFC also provide grants to landowners.

The work they have done so far is impressive.

- a. In 30 years 9 million trees planted
- b. From 6% forest cover in 1991 to 22% forest cover in 2021
- c. Aiming for 30% forest cover

NFC approach and key drivers:

- a. Creating secure and safer future
- b. Improving the wellbeing of our communities
- c. Facilitating Low Carbon and suitable economic

We found lots of synergy with Staffordshire County Council Priorities; work includes:

- a. Supporting Landowners
- b. Tree planting, some funding is available to support tree planting.
- c. Land acquisition – will consider others to buy land.
- d. Land to do research – can also pass on land with a covenant on it.
- e. Planning policies agreement with planning authorities (6 of them).
- f. Have a good relationship with builders in the National Forest – hedgerows instead of fences.

NFC work with people to develop community woodlands. They work with the community to prepare mapping and a woodland management plan; they apply for funding and engage with local people and schools. The importance of planning to plant the right trees in the right place was emphasised. Community woodlands are local to where people live, they are looked after by local communities, provided positive outdoor learning (forest schools and focus on secondary schools), develop skills and wellbeing, provide recreation and leisure. The outcomes were many for the green economy, greater resilience, regenerative farming, local grown timber, and green jobs supporting the environment and development sectors.

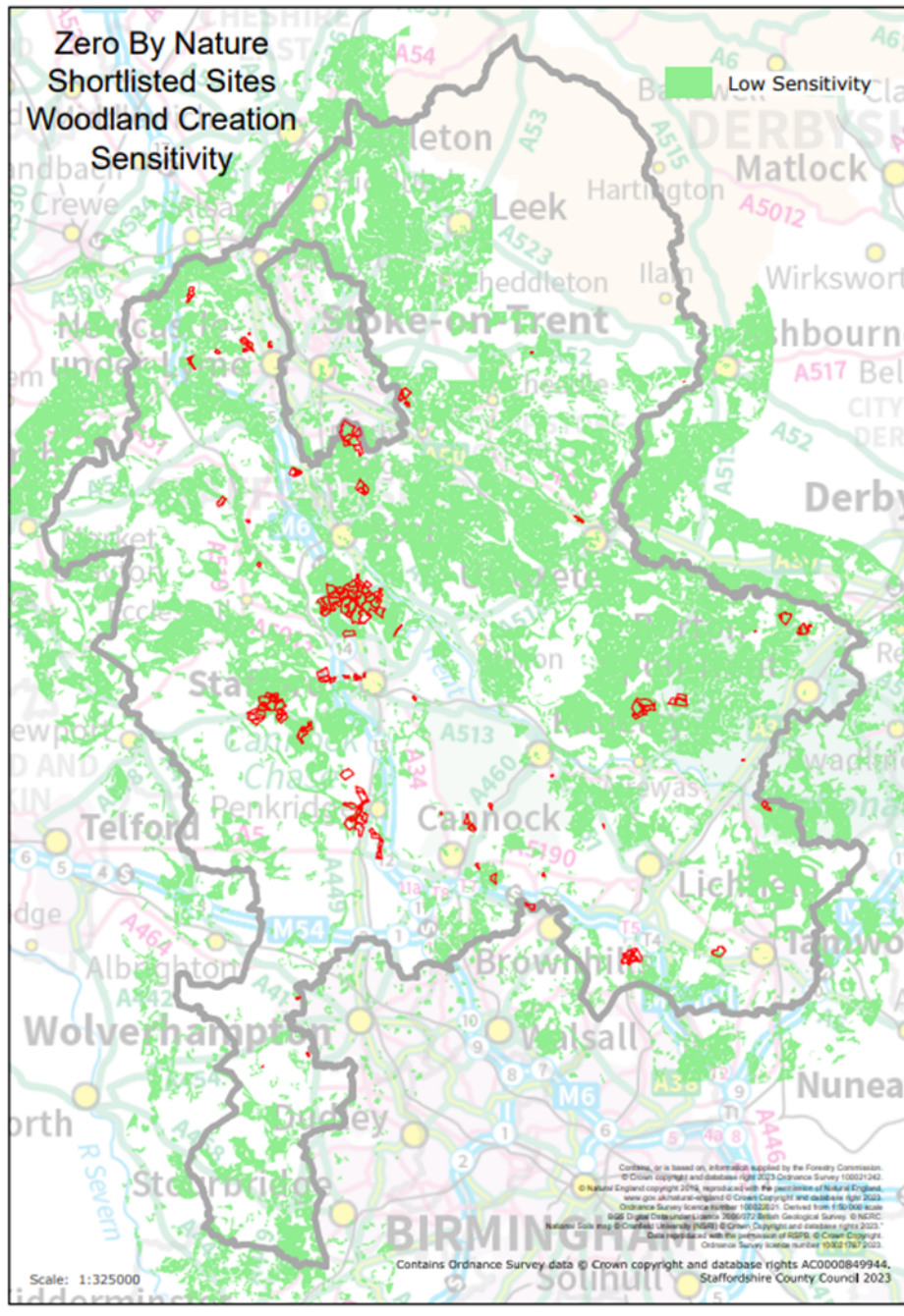
The National Forest provides an opportunity to see what was possible and proven to be successful. Over 20 years the National Forest (which included woodlands and towns), had added value to the local economy, increased tourism, created 5000 jobs and planted 9.5 million trees.

The benefits are highlighted:

- g. Increased nature, wellbeing, and reduced carbon.
- h. Regenerative farming with improved productivity
- i. Growing culture, arts, tourism, and leisure sectors inspired by nature, trees, and woodlands.
- j. Greater resilience in our economy through locally grown timber/wood products and renewable resources
- k. More and greener jobs supporting our environmental, land and development sectors.

Staffordshire County Council summary of evidence session

We considered the Staffordshire County Council Existing Rural Portfolio which consists of country parks, county farms, regenerations sites, landfill sites, maintained schools and corporate property, and viewed the Staffordshire County Council - Zero by Nature shortlisted sites:



The map indicates woodland creation sensitivity. County farms are shown on the map highlighted in red.

We considered that the acres needed for SCC to be totally zero carbon using its own portfolio would depend on the target and the type of trees planted. But it was estimated between 2,500 and 3,000 acres which would be 1,200 hectares. County farms have 2,600 hectares.

We recognised the need to consider planting trees on other small areas of the SCC portfolio land including gaps in hedgerows by roadside, windfall sites on farmland and other land considered was peat land which is of low sensitivity and quarry land. We

understand the need to consider the type of trees planted on highways and how we maintain these trees and trees in public spaces and housing estates. We were reassured that the Forestry Commission carry out aerial surveys to see what woodland and hedgerow is there and where small gaps are.

We understood that planning was vitally important - the right species, the right space to grow trees and to focus on low sensitivity land (highlighted in green on the map).

We understand that there is a need for the Council to engage better with farmers to respond to concerns around land value and tax benefits. It was understood that planting trees on agricultural/ fruit production land could potentially de-value land by 25-30%, but that the benefits of the greener economy, jobs and timber production may level that out. Currently 80% of timber in the UK is imported each year and there is potential to use land in a different way, to build resilience in changing international markets and support rural employment by growing and harvesting trees in the UK. We understood that tax benefits on a working farm would be minimal, benefits were on growing stock value, but that there would be tax incentives for rural areas. We further considered that biodiversity net gain payments were possible where cloughs or small unusable land were planted, and alternative use woodlands offer carbon payments which may help. This is a real shift towards planting a greater number of trees and we are aware that the concerns of farmers need to be an area of focus, to provide information and re-assurance, to encourage further consideration of change in land use but we also recognise that farmers would have to want to change land usage.

We also considered delivery of additional annual carbon sequestration by capital outlay on land and planting trees out of County. Other models were available to look at where land had been leased long-term or acquired cheaper and planting had happened in Wales and Scotland, but the wider benefits would not be realised in Staffordshire and although Forestry Commission had paid a peppercorn rate after the war this was not the situation now. We queried potential for strategic policy development of SCC land in a commercial model, considering tree planting credits based on current figures. It was established that currently there was not an exact figure available, but that GIS can be used to identify and overlay to determine if this was feasible. This was potentially an option to explore.

Carbon sequestration and woodland creation will be important to meet our commitment to net zero by 2025, we found that our climate change action plan is progressing well and is regularly reviewed and updated. We look forward to seeing the Zero by Nature report to further inform this work stream and what this Council plans to do next.

Conclusions

We must mitigate our residual carbon to meet our commitment to reach net zero by 2050.

We found the evidence gathered through our work enlightening and we believe that the best practice and expert advice given provides an achievable and sustainable way

forward which links with real industry leaders and can be transformative in wider terms in Staffordshire.

We have identified an ambitious way forward for Cabinet to work towards, which will meet the Council's net zero commitment and the wider outcomes and priorities of our Corporate Plan to look to support Staffordshire's economy to grow, generating more and better-paid jobs and tackle climate change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable.

Trees are the key to unlock the Council's path to net zero, and there is a need to push forward with tree planting. Rather than looking at this in isolation, the Council consider transformation of the area by creating multi-purpose woodlands and creating a concept forest with a pilot of farming, mixed economy, and tourism in Staffordshire.

This report provides a fresh perspective to explore how the Council use its Countryside Portfolio and explore woodland creation and farming in a leadership role and to work to meet the Council's climate change and biodiversity targets, develop skills, economy, and the wider agenda.

The Council has an opportunity to work with agricultural colleges and universities to develop skills in forestry and to plant and use a forest which can grow the green economy in Staffordshire.

The Council has potential for growth in its tourism offer and opportunity to increase visitor accommodation, forest lodges and glamping. Increasing well-being of Staffordshire residents and more diversity in the County tourism offer.

Staffordshire County Council is already moving forward with multiple workstreams to tackle climate change and biodiversity matters as demonstrated in the Climate Change Action Plan and we are aware of some specific constraints within the current policy framework that may need to be re-visited, there is more work to do.

We are assured that in a recent climate change consultation, feedback had shown that SCC is a trusted source of knowledge. As landowners we recognised the need for SCC to commit to lead the way by locking its carbon usage in its own assets.

We welcome Cabinet considering our report, we feel that our recommendations need to be ambitious recognising the significance and the speed required to progress them, but we also recognise more work is needed to:

- i. Identify land in the SCC rural portfolio that sits within the Forestry Commission low sensitivity areas of Staffordshire.
- ii. Complete an options appraisal for a given area of land use change, exploring options through agricultural diversification, woodland creation, and other alternatives to include financial value through carbon sequestration.
- iii. All benefits to be identified to give a balanced financial appraisal over a timeframe 2030-2070.

Staffordshire County Council values are 'ambitious courageous and empowering'. We are confident that this Council can lead the way for Staffordshire and that the recommendations coming from this work will provide a base for meeting our climate

change commitment, biodiversity enhancement and toward developing a plan for a Country Park for Staffordshire, developing skills, and improving the green economy in Staffordshire.

Recommendations

- 1) To consider the report of the Climate Change Working Group.
- 2) To recommend the following to Cabinet:

Carbon Sequestration

- a. That the Cabinet be requested to consider the amount of carbon sequestration that can be achieved on SCC land to mitigate residual carbon emissions from SCC's carbon footprint that will be present in 2050.
- b. That Cabinet consider how to progress planning for tree planting, woodland creation and to shape the concept model to plant a Staffordshire Forest taking into consideration comments made in the report conclusions.
- c. That Cabinet be requested to consider cessation of disposal of Council owned land /County farms already on the asset disposal list until it has been considered for inclusion in the concept model.

Woodland Creation

- d. That the Cabinet take advantage of Forestry Commission Funding identified by the working group which is available until March 2024 and apply for the planning, funding, establishing, growing and management of Woodlands at the earliest opportunity.
- e. That the Cabinet undertake to develop a delivery model to plant a Staffordshire Forest, not only to mitigate our carbon emissions but also to realise the wider benefits of woodland creation and, explore the wider benefits and partnership opportunities with organisations like Forestry Commission and National Forest Company (FC/NFC).
- f. That the Leader and Cabinet Members be requested to engage with the District and Borough Councils at the Leaders Board and Sustainability Board to consider the concept model for a Staffordshire Forest, to invest in woodlands as a way to tackle the dual crisis of climate change and biodiversity.

Acknowledgements

- a. Norbury Estate
- b. Forestry Commission
- c. The National Forest Company

Scope of the Working Group

- a. To identify mechanisms to mitigate carbon emissions in Staffordshire through sequestration and offsetting.
- b. scrutinise/offer challenge to the Cabinet on sequestration to ensure the Council are doing all they can to ensure that it achieves its commitment to be net zero by 2050.
- c. scrutinise any plans/strategies that are developed on sequestration, with particular focus on timescales to achieve our aims.
- d. scrutinise SCC departments to see whether their strategies are aligned with sequestration.
- e. Scrutinise and identify the wider benefits to Staffordshire that sequestration schemes in the County may bring to resident and businesses.

Methods of evidence gathering

- a. Research secondary data
- b. Reports and presentations at meetings
- c. Evidence gathering by the Working Group - primary data
- d. Site visits – Norbury Park Estate and BIFORS
- e. Expert witnesses – Forestry Commission and National Forest Company
- f. Consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change who also attended a number of working group meetings as an observer and also the participated in the Norbury Park Estate site visit.

Visit to Norbury Park Estate – Group photo



Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 January 2024

Natural Environment Strategy



Councillor Simon Tagg, Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change said,

“Staffordshire is a stunning rural county but, like much of the UK, nature is under pressure here too. We must act now to help nature recover.

“That is why we have developed this Natural Environment Strategy, which sets out the actions we will take in the coming years to care for nature on our land and through our activities. This will form part of wider efforts across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which will be identified through the local

nature recovery strategy we are leading with our partners and stakeholders.

“By helping nature, we are also helping ourselves. Nature provides important goods and services that support our wellbeing and quality of life. From the insects that pollinate our food crops, to trees storing carbon, nature is essential to us.”

Report Summary:

Staffordshire’s natural environment is one of its greatest assets. It is what makes Staffordshire a great place to live, and a vibrant part of our offer to visitors. As a council, we recognise and value the vital contribution it makes environmentally, socially, economically, and for our health and wellbeing – we want Staffordshire to continue to be a great place for nature and people.

The Environment Act 2021 brought in new duties and requirements for local authorities in relation to biodiversity and the natural environment, including a strengthened duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity, the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain through the planning system, and the requirement to report on biodiversity delivery.

A Natural Environment Strategy has been developed to set out how the Council will deliver its biodiversity requirements and enhance the natural environment.

Recommendation

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Considers and approves, with any amendments, the natural environment strategy.

Cabinet – Wednesday 17 January 2024

Natural Environment Strategy

Recommendation of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Considers and approves, with any amendments, the natural environment strategy.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. Staffordshire has a rich and varied natural environment. This is one of our greatest assets and makes Staffordshire a great place to live, work and visit. With so many pressures on the environment, and the major threats to our wildlife, taking action for our natural environment is essential to sustain our communities, economy, health and wellbeing.
2. In 2018 Government launched its 25-year Environment Plan to help the natural world regain and retain good health. 2023 saw the first 5-year review of the plan, resulting in a refreshed Environmental Improvement Plan. This also reflects global commitments made at the UN Nature Summit COP15.
3. Key Government commitments are to:
 - a. halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.
 - b. protect 30% of UK land for biodiversity by 2030.
 - c. increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels by 2042.
 - d. restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats by 2042.
 - e. reduce the risk of species extinction by 2042.
 - f. restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term by 2042.

4. The Environment Act 2021 brought in new duties and requirements to support the ambitions of the 25-year plan. In relation to biodiversity this includes:
 - a. Developing Local Nature Recovery Strategies
 - b. A strengthened biodiversity duty
 - c. Mandatory minimum 10% biodiversity net gain through the planning system
 - d. A requirement for local authorities to produce a report on their action for biodiversity.

5. As part of the strengthened biodiversity duty, public authorities must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies based on their consideration and act to deliver them. Reports should then be published outlining progress and further actions every five years (or more frequently as required) with the end date of the first reporting period no later than 1st January 2026.

6. A Natural Environment Strategy (see appendix 1) has been developed with input from officers across the authority. The strategy takes into account our consideration of our duty and the associated Defra guidance, the national targets agreed by Government, and our existing nature recovery declaration, agreed at full council in February 2022. It reflects continued efforts to manage protected sites in our ownership, our work to support rare and endangered species and the role we can play as champions for nature with our partners and communities.

7. The strategy sets out a broad mission statement and ten high level objectives that Staffordshire County Council will take to conserve and enhance biodiversity and our wider natural environment. These are:
 - a. **Mission Statement** - *We will directly support nature recovery in Staffordshire, through targeted action across our land and functions, and as a champion for activity across the county.*

 - b. **To achieve this, we will:**
 - i. Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
 - ii. Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.
 - iii. Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment.
 - iv. Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042.
 - v. Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030.
 - vi. Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges.

- vii. Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land.
 - viii. Use nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change wherever possible, to maximise benefits to both wildlife and climate.
 - ix. Enhance and restore landscape character and quality and support landscape-scale nature recovery.
 - x. Champion biodiversity, raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.
8. The strategy includes actions and milestones to achieve these objectives. The strategy will be reviewed in late 2025 and a progress report and refreshed strategy will be produced by January 2026 to comply with Environment Act requirements. This review will also align the strategy with the local nature recovery strategy, which will provide a framework for nature across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and is due to be produced by March 2025.
9. The following key performance indicators are proposed to monitor performance against the objectives:
- a. Condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in council ownership – % in favourable condition and unfavourable recovering condition.
 - b. Hectares of council land designated as County Wildlife Site and in positive management.
 - c. Number of trees planted and percentage woodland cover.
 - d. Length of roadside verge managed for biodiversity.
 - e. Percentage of county farm and other leased land in an environmental management scheme for biodiversity.
 - f. Measures for species installed in council properties.
 - g. Status of target species on council key sites (TBC).
 - h. Volunteer hours on environmental management and awareness-raising.
 - i. Number of children engaged in environmental activities, e.g. on the countryside estate and via the HAF programme.
 - j. Social media followers / engagement on the council's environmental pages.

Legal Implications

10. The Natural Environment Strategy sets out how we will deliver our legal obligations in relation to biodiversity under the Environment Act 2021 and takes into account other environmental legislation.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

11. Grants have been provided to support delivery of some elements of Environment Act biodiversity delivery, including £436,000 for development of the local nature recovery strategy over three financial years 2022-5 (we received £48,000 in 22/23, £207,000 in 23/24 and the balance £181,000 to be received in 24/25) ; and £37,000 received to date to prepare for biodiversity net gain. The council also receives around £361,000 per year in agri-environment grants to support environmental management on country parks.
12. Other initiatives are accounted for in existing budgets and via external grant bids. For example, much current activity for species conservation at Cannock Chase is supported through the AONB Partnership. Some further external funding bids will be required to support delivery of the natural environment strategy.

Climate Change Implications

13. The Natural Environment Strategy links to delivery of the council's climate change action plans for net zero and adaptation. Management of natural habitats supports carbon sequestration and storage which will be essential elements of achieving the council's net zero target by 2050. Natural habitats also support adaptation by providing benefits such as urban cooling and flood amelioration.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Natural Environment Strategy.

Community Impact Assessment.

Contact Details

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Enhancing Nature

Staffordshire County Council's Natural Environment Strategy 2024-26



Foreword

Our natural environment underpins our quality of life and helps make Staffordshire a great place to live, work and visit.

As a County Council, we are the guardians of some of Staffordshire's finest areas for wildlife. Our country parks support wildlife of international, national, and local importance, and provide great opportunities for people to interact with nature. Less well-known is the great work we are also doing for nature in other places, across business parks and schools, for example.

But there is more to do, and never has there been a more crucial time to take action. Our nature recovery declaration, made by Full Council in 2022, confirmed our commitment to protecting wildlife. This strategy sets out the actions we will take across our functions, reflecting our strengthened duty to enhance biodiversity. It includes actions across all our functions and provides the means to keep track of what we are doing.



Councillor Simon Tagg,
Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

Enhancing Nature

What is this strategy for?

Our natural environment strategy sets out how we, Staffordshire County Council, will conserve and enhance biodiversity and the wider natural environment on our land and through our functions.

We value the natural environment and recognise the vital role it plays in Staffordshire: environmentally, socially, economically and for our health and wellbeing. We also understand the pressures facing our natural environment, and the need to take action now to help nature recover.

We have declared a climate change emergency and made a nature recovery declaration through our Full Council. This strategy sets out how we will care for nature. It includes action we will take over the coming years. In late 2025, we will report on progress and set out an updated strategy.

Why do we need this strategy?

Across the world, nature is in crisis. One million species are threatened with extinction, many within decades. Our planet is experiencing the largest loss of life since the dinosaurs and it is largely the result of human activity.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Wildlife in England has declined in abundance by 32% on average since 1970 and 13% of species in England are threatened with extinction.

A suite of commitments have been made by Government, some of which are international commitments made through the COP15 Biodiversity Agreement:

By 2030, the government has committed to:

- halt the decline in species abundance
- protect 30% of UK land

By 2042, the government has committed to:

- increase species abundance by at least 10% from 2030, surpassing 2022 levels
- restore or create at least 500,000 ha of a range of wildlife rich habitats
- reduce the risk of species extinction
- restore 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term

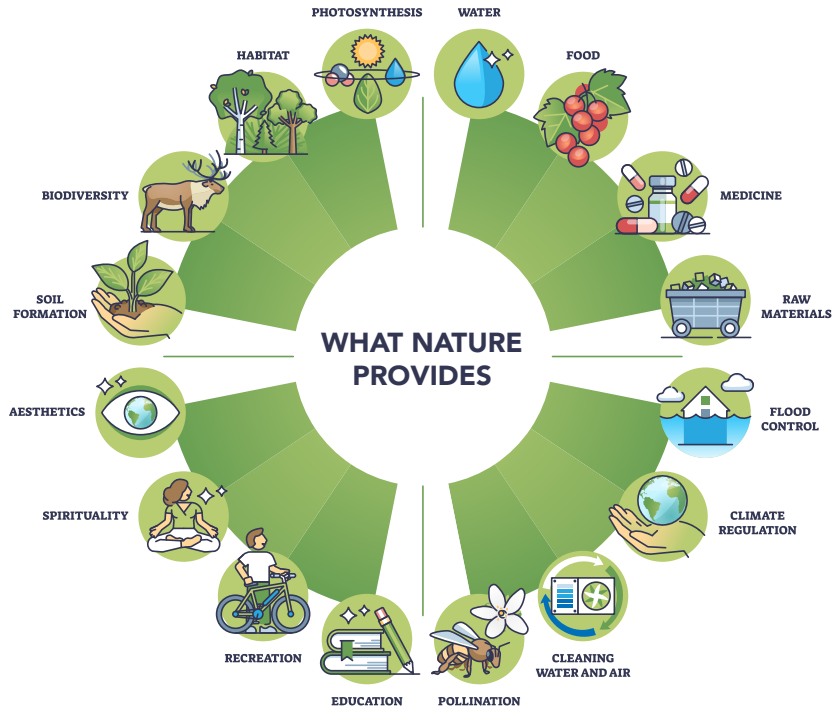
The Environment Act 2021 provides some of the legal mechanisms to support nature recovery in England. It includes the development of local nature recovery strategies, a strengthened biodiversity duty for public bodies and the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain through the planning process.

Staffordshire is a beautiful rural county but, like much of the UK, nature is under pressure here too. In 2022 Staffordshire County Council made a nature recovery declaration, recognising the need to take action for wildlife.

This strategy sets out the actions we will take to contribute to nature recovery through our own activities. This will form part of wider efforts across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which will be identified through the local nature recovery strategy.

Helping nature helps us

By helping nature, we are also helping ourselves. Nature provides important goods and services that support our wellbeing and quality of life. From the insects that pollinate our food crops, to trees storing carbon, nature is essential to us.



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1.0 Diagram of ecosystem services

Mission Statement

We will directly support nature recovery in Staffordshire, through targeted action across our land and functions, and as a champion for activity across the county.

To achieve this, we will:

1. Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
2. Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.
3. Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment.
4. Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042.
5. Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030.
6. Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges.
7. Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land.
8. Use nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change wherever possible, to maximise benefits to both wildlife and climate.
9. Enhance and restore landscape character and quality and support landscape-scale nature recovery.
10. Raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.

1. **Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**

Staffordshire County Council has been appointed as the responsible authority under the Environment Act to work with partners to coordinate development of a local nature recovery strategy (LNRS) for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The LNRS will identify the most important areas, opportunities, and priorities for wildlife.

Actions

- 1.1 Working with partners, lead the development and publication of the LNRS.
- 1.2 Coordinate collaborative delivery and monitoring of the LNRS.
- 1.3 Review and republish our natural environment strategy to ensure it supports delivery of the LNRS.

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2. **Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.**

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) will be a legal requirement for most development from 2024. This will include our own county council developments which will need to demonstrate at least 10% gain in terms of area habitat (e.g. grassland, woodland), hedges and watercourses where these are affected.

We will also have a responsibility for checking, monitoring and recording all BNG connected with planning applications for which we are the planning authority, and we will report our progress on this.

Actions

- 2.1 Ensure effective delivery mechanisms are in place to deliver BNG through the planning process.
- 2.2 Identify county council land that could support BNG delivery.
- 2.3 Work collaboratively with local authority partners, landowners and environmental bodies to maximise the benefits of BNG for nature recovery.

3. **Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment.**

We undertake many different operations that impact on the environment for example management of highways, local flood risk and minerals and waste planning. We need to review activities to ensure they meet our strengthened duty to enhance biodiversity and minimise wider environmental impacts.

This includes when we are making decisions and developing strategies and plans, but also in our day-to-day activities.

Actions

- 3.1 Ensure County Council decisions take account of biodiversity conservation and enhancement and ensure that staff receive appropriate induction and training.
- 3.2 Consider biodiversity enhancement through all policy and strategy development for example, Better Health Staffordshire, Local Transport Plan, Flood Risk Strategy, Minerals and Waste Local Plans.
- 3.3 All council contracts and supplies to be peat-free wherever possible.
- 3.4 All council contracts and supplies to reduce pesticides wherever possible.
- 3.5 Promote positive behaviours and prohibit the use of environmentally harmful materials and activities on county council land, such as balloon launches, Chinese lanterns, disposable BBQs, other non-biodegradable materials.
- 3.6 All county council activities to follow good practice for biosecurity for example when working in and adjacent to water, or when receiving delivery of imported plants and construction materials.

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Climate change means there is an increasing risk of wildfires, but also accidental fires from barbeques and lanterns can be avoided.

Photo credit SCC

White-clawed crayfish are threatened by crayfish plague which can be carried on equipment, pets and clothing. Biosecurity measures 'check, clean, dry' include checking equipment over for any animals that may be 'hitching a lift', drying and cleaning kit between sites and use of disinfectant.



Photo credit: Nick Mott, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust



4. **Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042.**

The network of protected sites across the country provides vital space for nature. There is a national target to make sure that 75% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are in 'favourable condition' by 2042.

We have 1404 hectares (ha) of land designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (nationally important) at Cannock Chase and Chasewater Country Parks, of which 1077 ha of Cannock Chase is also designated as Special Area of Conservation (internationally important). Currently 90% of our SSSI land is improving in condition and working towards favourable status. There are studies under way to investigate why some areas are not in recovering condition.

We also have 297 ha designated land in around 20 Local Wildlife Sites, which are of county level importance. These sites require survey and a review of management.

Some of our protected sites include Scheduled Monuments and other important historic features, such as the remains of two Great War training camps on Cannock Chase. Managing for nature and managing historic features often go hand in hand, and conserving and enhancing the historic environment can play a key role in delivering sustainable nature recovery.

Actions

- 4.1 Continue delivery of our management schemes for Sites of Special Scientific Interest to reach favourable condition and undertake regular monitoring.
- 4.2 Establish a programme of surveys of Local Wildlife Sites in council ownership and update management briefs.
- 4.3 Embed best practice guidance on the historic environment when deciding management approaches for nature.



Grazing at Chasewater - grazing of heathlands and other habitats is a good way of managing land. Grazing animals create better conditions for wildlife by recreating natural processes.

Photo credit
D Saberton, SCC



Specialist equipment cutting heather on Cannock Chase. This low-impact mower does not damage historic features such as the remains of the Great War Training Camps.

Photo credit
D Saberton, SCC

5. **Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030.**

There is a national target, and global commitment, to have 30% of land protected for biodiversity by 2030. To make a meaningful contribution to this target, ideally land should both have some form of protection and be in positive management so that it is either in, or moving towards, good condition for wildlife.

We estimate that around 22% of our land (excluding highways) may be relevant as it is protected, in management schemes and moving towards good condition for wildlife. Our priority is to continue to manage these sites towards good condition.

We will also explore the potential to increase council land protected and managed for biodiversity, which could potentially include land secured for biodiversity net gain, improved management of local wildlife sites, and land in higher tier agri-environment schemes. We will also undertake work to assess and understand the scale of opportunity to enhance biodiversity on land associated with highways.

Actions

- 5.1 Ensure management measures and monitoring regimes are in place on all protected sites.
- 5.2 Identify further opportunities to protect our land for biodiversity including land associated with highways.
- 5.3 Encourage uptake of schemes that support biodiversity on county leased land.



Meadows and other habitats at Redhill Business Park meet criteria for designation as Local Wildlife Site only ten years after creation.

Photo credit
J Askey, SCC

6. **Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges by April 2026.**

Staffordshire County Council is the highways authority responsible for managing roads and rights of way across the county, excluding motorways and trunk roads. Roadside verges can provide important corridors for wildlife movement, and sources of food and shelter for pollinating insects and other species. In Staffordshire some verges, particularly in East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Staffordshire Moorlands have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites.

There are opportunities to improve our verges for wildlife with careful management. In urban areas, gaining community support and understanding for this approach will be important for success.

Actions

- 6.1 Survey road verges and identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement where compatible with safety.
- 6.2 Review management of verges to promote biodiversity and increase carbon capture where appropriate.
- 6.3 Raise awareness of the importance of verges for wildlife.



Examples of Staffordshire verges managed for wildlife.

Photo credit
all R N Hill



7. **Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land by April 2025.**

Wildlife in England has declined in abundance by 32% on average since 1970, and 13% of assessed species in England are threatened with extinction. 64% of flowering plant species assessed in England have seen decreases in their distributions. The UK holds key populations of some species which are rare elsewhere in the world.

We are already involved in species recovery work on country parks and other landholdings. For example, we are involved in projects to restore and conserve native crayfish, adder, nightjar and rare insects at Cannock Chase. On our country parks and business parks we are championing work to support amphibians such as great crested newts, and we are also adopting measures to support wildlife in our properties, such as bird and bat boxes.

Usually, good habitat management will ensure that species thrive, but some species need extra help. The local nature recovery strategy will develop a list of key species for the county. We will cross check that list against our land and include relevant species in management plans for all sites.

Invasive species and diseases are an increasing threat to wildlife. Some invasive species have been present for many years and are showing a gradual increase where not controlled (such as Himalayan balsam) but others seem to be increasing as a result of climate change (for example warmer, wetter conditions favour fungal diseases such as Phytophthora found on bilberry). Regular monitoring of habitats is the best way to identify new cases and ensure action is taken early on.

Actions

7.1 Retrofit measures for species in existing county council properties and include in all new county council development. Species measures to include where appropriate hedgehog gaps under fences, bird and bat boxes, invertebrate features and pollinator planting.

- 7.2 Continue to create special features for heathland and woodland invertebrates at Chasewater and Cannock Chase.
- 7.3 Continue to monitor and support bat populations on our country parks.
- 7.4 Support adder survey and modelling work for Cannock Chase and the wider county, developing a plan for the species on our land by end 2025.
- 7.5 Continue to support the creation and surveying of ark sites for native crayfish.
- 7.6 Building on the local nature recovery strategy, develop a species action plan for all county council land by end 2025.
- 7.7 Undertake regular monitoring of key habitats to check for invasive species and diseases and undertake action to tackle as appropriate.
- 7.8 Continue to collaborate with tenant farmers on the County Farms estate to enhance habitat provision and biodiversity and the adoption of environmental land management schemes.



New Moorlands Sensory Garden with planting suitable for pollinators – this was previously just concrete with a small lawn.

Photo credit
Insert Here



At Cannock Chase, we are working in partnership with expert advice from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust on a programme of habitat creation for crayfish, other rare invertebrates, and small fish species.



Trees felled to create small pools and backwaters

Photo credit
Nick Mott, SWT

A suite of recent measures for biodiversity at school sites
St Leonards School, Stafford

- 'Woodland walk' with peripheral ground left wild to attract wildlife.
- Trees removed have been chopped up and left to rot in clusters (bug hotels) to attract creatures.
- Hedge planting.



Photo credit: C Grocott, SCC

Paulet High School, Burton

- Tree planting and naturalised grassland



Photo credit: Insert Here

Biodiversity enhancement – providing hedgehog access can help this endangered species. Picture and hedgehog advice and specification courtesy of Hedgehog Street.



Photo credit:
Christopher Morgan via Hedgehog Street

8. Use nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change wherever possible, to maximise benefits to both wildlife and climate.

Climate change is apparent in the increasing stormy weather events with high rainfall and winds, plus hotter summers. We are noticing more flooding and natural flood management can help with this. Good habitat management such as grazing, and bracken control will help prevent wildfires. Many species will struggle to adapt, so providing bigger, more joined up habitats will help them develop stronger populations and help them move to find suitable conditions. We will also need to consider which species will best resist climate change when we plant new areas.

Woodland is an important habitat, supporting many species, but trees can also deliver numerous wider benefits such as carbon storage, buffering pollution, flood protection and cooling. There is a national target to increase woodland cover in England to 16.5% by the end of 2050 and to increase tree cover outside of woodlands.

The local nature recovery strategy will identify priority areas for woodland expansion to link and connect wooded habitats. We are also exploring how we can use nature-based solutions such as tree planting to achieve our net zero carbon target by 2050. Within our landholding we have ancient woodland and veteran trees which are irreplaceable habitats that need particular care. We also have tree diseases such as ash dieback on our land, and this will affect our trees and woodlands over coming years.

Actions

- 8.1 Identify nature-based solutions as part of our climate change adaptation action plan.
- 8.2 Develop a plan by April 2025 for expansion of woodland and tree cover to help achieve net zero, maximising biodiversity and other environmental benefits, ensuring that we follow the principle of 'right tree, right place, right purpose'.



Woodland planting at Kingswood Lakeside, Cannock was completed in 2008. It provides attractive screening of development, amenity for local residents and employees, and habitats for wildlife.



The edges of blocks of woodland were designed at different angles to maximise the number of micro-climates around the edges of the woodland. Designed woodland connects with areas of existing woodland off site, creating corridors to aid in the movement of wildlife.



Open areas in between the blocks of woodland allow for the creation of a network of footpaths.

Photo credit: C Evans, SCC.

Flood storage swale at St Leonard's Schol, Stafford, which will add water storage volume at key times which will also attract wildlife. Fencing is for safety of young children.



Photo credit:
C Grocott, SCC

9. Enhance and restore landscape character and quality and support landscape-scale nature recovery.

Within Staffordshire there are two nationally important protected landscapes, the Peak District National Park and Cannock National Landscape. The National Forest also extends into Staffordshire and is an important area of landscape restoration. On a smaller scale, fifteen Registered Parks and Gardens are also nationally protected. Staffordshire remains largely a rural county with a diverse character. Many areas have a high landscape quality and sensitivity.

Staffordshire's historic landscapes are rich in cultural heritage. The diversity of our landscapes greatly contributes to our sense of place and local identity, and the historic environment further reinforces the special character of our landscapes.

Working in partnership has enabled us to support the development and delivery of landscape-scale initiatives that enhance nature, landscape and our historic environment, working closely with local people. Recent examples include Transforming the Trent Valley, the South West Peak Project and working with partners in the Cannock Chase AONB and Special Area of Conservation Partnerships. There are ongoing projects and potential to develop further initiatives that deliver for nature at landscape-scale.

Actions

- 9.1 Ensure County Council decisions take account of landscape conservation and enhancement and our duties for our protected landscapes.
- 9.2 Continue to host the Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership and actively support the management and enhancement of our protected landscapes.
- 9.3 Support the development and delivery of landscape-scale initiatives in key areas as appropriate.
- 9.4 Promote hedgerow creation and restoration where appropriate, to restore and protect landscape-scale character and quality and contribute towards biodiversity net gain.

10. **Champion biodiversity, raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.**

Nature underpins our quality of life. The health benefits of engaging in nature are well-understood, both for physical health and mental wellbeing. But while nature can look after us, we also need to care for it in return. Never has there been a more important time for us all to take action for nature.

We can all make a difference – by living more sustainably, reducing food waste, using water wisely, and reducing our carbon footprint. We can also get directly involved in supporting nature – by volunteering, taking part in wildlife surveys, supporting a wildlife charity and making our gardens and community spaces wildlife-friendly.

We will support our communities wherever possible to empower them to make a difference.

Part of GCSE Actions

- 10.1 Deliver awareness campaigns on ways people can support nature recovery.
- 10.2 Work with other bodies to support the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.
- 10.3 Support volunteering activity on our countryside sites.
- 10.4 Offer support and signposting to nature connection through our network of Library Champions.
- 10.5 Develop a programme with family support teams, including walks, events and activities and link with our Holiday Activities and Food programme providers to explore opportunities to celebrate nature.
- 10.6 Continue to support forest school provision and other educational initiatives, exploring links to the new natural history GCSE.

- 10.7 Support delivery of the Better Health Staffordshire initiative across the county.



Culture Nature, a project developed by Natural England and Libraries Connected has awarded Staffordshire Libraries and Arts Service funding to deliver Growing Connections. This project aims to promote mental health and wellbeing and encourage action

for nature's recovery. It will connect arts and practical activities at Biddulph and Perton Libraries with the local environment, engaging difficult to reach groups and encouraging active involvement.

Recent give-aways of wildflower seeds and trees proved very popular and helped convey messages about the importance of pollinators and the value of trees.

Preparing free trees and care advice for garden give away



Photo credit: Rose Hampton

Gardening for Better Health in Burton-on-Trent focuses on helping communities to grow food, with health and environmental benefits.



Photo credit:
Insert Name

Move More Moorlands is an initiative to encourage more active lifestyles through a series of activities and engagement around our green spaces and countryside.



Photo credit
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Action Plan

Action Ref.	Action	By when
Objective 1 - Develop and deliver a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent		
1.1	Development and publication of the LNRS	April 2025
1.2	Coordinate collaborative delivery and monitoring of the LNRS	2023-2025
1.3	Review and republish our natural environment strategy in line with LNRS	December 2025
Objective 2 - Ensure coordinated delivery of biodiversity net gain.		
2.1	Ensure effective delivery mechanisms are in place to deliver BNG through the planning process	
	2.1.1 Include BNG in pre-application guidance and advice	By end 2023
	2.1.2 Check, ratify and record BNG for planning applications	From January 2024 (large sites) and April 2024 for small sites
	2.1.3 Include BNG reporting in minerals and waste annual monitoring report and report on county developments	By end 2024
	2.1.4 Devise monitoring programme for all BNG 30-year plans	By end 2024
2.2	Identify county council land that could support BNG delivery	
	2.2.1 Complete a pilot study on countryside estate and on larger business parks	By end 2024
	2.2.2 Expand pilot work to include all SCC land	By end 2026
2.3	Work collaboratively with local authority partners, landowners and environmental bodies to maximise the benefits of BNG for nature recovery	
	2.3.1 Explore countywide system for promoting and monitoring BNG	By end 2024
Objective 3 - Ensure our policies, strategies and operations consider biodiversity enhancement and reduce risks to the environment		
3.1	Ensure County Council decisions take account of biodiversity conservation and enhancement and ensure that staff receive appropriate induction and training	Ongoing
3.2	Consider biodiversity enhancement through all policy and strategy development for example, Better Health Staffordshire, Local Transport Plan, Flood Risk Strategy, Minerals and Waste Local Plans.	Ongoing
3.3	All council contracts and supplies to be peat-free wherever possible.	By April 2024
3.4	All council contracts and supplies to reduce pesticides wherever possible	By end 2024
3.5	Promote positive behaviours and prohibit the use of environmentally harmful materials and activities on county council land, including balloon launches, Chinese lanterns, disposable BBQs, other non-biodegradable materials	Ongoing
3.6	All county council activities to follow good practice for biosecurity for example when working in and adjacent to water, or when receiving delivery of imported plants and construction materials	Ongoing

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Action Ref.	Action	By when
Objective 4 - Ensure all designated sites in our ownership have management measures in place to achieve favourable condition by 2042		
4.1	Continue delivery of management schemes for Sites of Special Scientific Interest to reach favourable condition and undertake regular monitoring.	Ongoing
4.2	Establish a programme of surveys of Local Wildlife Sites in council ownership and update management briefs	
	4.2.1 Survey first tranche of 7 sites and produce management briefs	End 2025
	4.2.2 Survey 2nd tranche of 7 sites and produce management briefs	End 2027
	4.2.3 Survey final tranche of 7 sites and produce management briefs	End 2029
4.3	Embed best practice guidance on the historic environment when deciding management approaches for nature	Ongoing
Objective 5 - Manage and protect 30% of our land (excluding highways) for biodiversity by 2030		
5.1	Ensure management measures and monitoring regimes are in place on all protected sites	Ongoing see Objective 4
5.2	Identify further opportunities to protect our land for biodiversity including land associated with highways	
	5.2.1 Identify and survey potential county wildlife sites on SCC land	By 2026 / ongoing
5.3	Encourage uptake of schemes that support biodiversity on county leased land	By end 2025
Objective 6 - Develop a wildlife-friendly management approach to roadside verges by 2026		
6.1	Survey road verges and identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement where compatible with safety	By end 2026
6.2	Review management of verges to promote biodiversity and increase carbon capture where appropriate	By end 2026
6.3	Raise awareness of the importance of verges for wildlife.	Ongoing
Objective 7 - Develop a suite of species recovery measures for our land by April 2025		
7.1	Retrofit measures for species in existing county council properties and include in all new county council development.	
	7.1.1 Develop programme of retrofit opportunities as part of annual maintenance / improvement programme	From April 2024
	7.1.2 Incorporate in all new development	From January 2024
7.2	Continue to create special features for heathland and woodland invertebrates at Chasewater and Cannock Chase.	Ongoing
7.3	Continue to monitor and support bat populations on our country parks.	Ongoing
7.4	Support adder survey and modelling work for Cannock Chase and the wider county, developing a plan for the species on our land.	By end 2025
7.5	Continue to support the creation and surveying of ark sites for native crayfish	Ongoing

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Action Ref.	Action	By when
7.6	Building on the local nature recovery strategy, develop a species action plan for all county council land	by end 2025
7.6.1	Produce list based on LNRS priorities	End 2024
7.6.2	Produce species action plan for all major sites (over 50ha) and sites with known populations of priority species	End 2025
7.6.3	Produce action plan for sites 5-50ha	End 2026
7.6.4	Consider remaining sites	End 2027
7.7	Undertake regular monitoring of key habitats to check for invasive species and diseases and undertake action to tackle as appropriate	Ongoing
7.8	Continue to collaborate with tenant farmers on the County Farms' estate to enhance habitat provision and biodiversity and the adoption of environmental land management schemes.	Ongoing
Objective 8 - Use nature-based solutions for mitigating and adapting to climate change wherever possible, to maximise benefits to both wildlife and climate.		
8.1	Identify nature-based solutions as part of our climate change adaptation action plan	By end 2024
8.2	Develop a plan for expansion of woodland and tree cover to help achieve net zero, maximising biodiversity and other environmental benefits, ensuring that we follow the principle of 'right tree, right place, right purpose'	by April 2025
Objective 9 - Enhance and restore landscape character and quality		
9.1	Ensure County Council decisions take account of landscape conservation and enhancement and our duties for our national landscapes	Ongoing
9.2	Continue to host the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership and support the management of our national landscapes	Ongoing
9.3	Support the development and delivery of landscape-scale initiatives in key areas as appropriate	Ongoing
9.4	Promote hedgerow creation and restoration where appropriate, to restore and protect landscape-scale character and quality and contribute towards biodiversity net gain	Ongoing
Objective 10 - Champion biodiversity, raise awareness and support the active involvement of communities in caring for our natural environment.		
10.1	Deliver awareness campaigns on ways people can support nature recovery	Minimum 2 campaigns per year
10.2	Work with other bodies to support the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity	Ongoing
10.3	Support volunteering activity on our countryside sites	Ongoing
10.4	Offer support and signposting to nature connection through our network of Library Champions	By end 2024
10.5	Develop a programme with family support teams, including walks, events and activities and link with our Holiday Activities and Food programme providers to explore opportunities to celebrate nature	By end 2025
10.6	Continue to support forest school provision and other educational initiatives, exploring links to the new natural history GCSE	Ongoing / 2024-5
10.7	Support delivery of the Better Health Staffordshire initiative across the county	Ongoing

Enhancing Nature

Staffordshire County Council's Natural Environment Strategy 2024-2026

Community Impact Assessment

Natural Environment Strategy

Author: Sarah Bentley, Head of Environment &
Countryside

Date: December 2023

➤ **Equality Assessment**

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
Age - older and younger people	There are benefits to everyone from supporting a healthy natural environment and functioning ecosystems.		
Disability - people who are living with different conditions and disabilities, such as: mental illnesses, long term conditions, Autism and other neurodiverse conditions, learning disabilities, sensory impairment and physical disabilities.		People with different abilities may be impacted by some measures, such as accessibility impacts from more natural roadside verges, or lack of accessibility to green spaces.	Undertake accessibility checks for measures that may impact on public access, such as verge management or access works to green spaces to ensure they consider inclusivity.
Gender reassignment - those people in the process of transitioning from one sex to another			
Marriage & Civil Partnership - people who are married or in a civil partnership should not be treated differently at work			
Pregnancy & Maternity - women who are pregnant or who have recently had a baby, including breast feeding mothers			
Race - people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins			
Religion or Belief - people with any religious or philosophical belief, including a lack of belief. A		Evidence shows that people with some protected characteristics may be under-represented as users of the countryside and green spaces due to a variety of cultural, societal and physical factors. This could impact on the inclusivity of community engagement and involvement elements	Ensure that opportunities for community engagement and involvement, such as volunteering, are inclusively promoted and operated.

Protected Characteristics	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
belief should affect a person's life choices or the way they live for it to be considered		of the proposals, such as volunteering.	
Sex - men or women			
Sexual orientation - whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes			

Page 71 **Workforce Assessment**

Who will be affected – consider the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
n/a			

➤ **Health, Well-being and Social Care Assessment**

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<p>The strategy proposes to support biodiversity recovery and enhance natural environments.</p>	<p>Evidence demonstrates that spending time in natural environments can reduce stress and support health and wellbeing. Natural environments also support climate adaptation, reduce air pollution, and support other essential ecosystem services that in turn support human health. The strategy aims to support biodiversity and natural processes.</p>	<p>Nature recovery is overwhelmingly positive for human health. There ay be minor risks of zoonoses (animal-derived disease) in some circumstances.</p>	<p>Follow appropriate guidance.</p>

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<p>The strategy proposes to support biodiversity recovery and enhance natural environments, with a focus on council-owned land and council functions. Objectives include raising awareness and actively involving communities.</p>	<p>Supporting nature recovery and natural environments can bring many benefits to Staffordshire's communities, enhancing the county as a great place to live, work and visit. Communities have a vital role to play in supporting nature, for example through citizen science and volunteering. This in turn can support learning, health and wellbeing and community cohesion.</p>	<p>There is a risk that some communities that could benefit from nature can be harder to reach or may have less access to green space. For example, more deprived communities often have less accessible green space available to them and opportunities to benefit from nature can therefore be limited.</p>	<p>Ensure measures to ensure inclusion and accessibility are built into strategy implementation. Explore through the local nature recovery strategy ways to make nature more accessible to all communities.</p>

Key consideration	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<p>The strategy proposes to support biodiversity recovery and enhance natural environments, with a focus on council-owned land and council functions. Objectives include delivery of biodiversity enhancement through the planning process, other strategies / plans and through our properties.</p>	<p>Functioning ecosystems support the economy in numerous ways, underpinning ecosystem services such as pollination of crops, reducing air pollution, flood reduction, nutrient cycling etc. A thriving natural environment also underpins the visitor economy and supports inward investment.</p>	<p>There may be impacts on costs of development and other strategy delivery due to requirements to deliver biodiversity gain / enhancement, however there are also economic opportunities e.g. through offering net gain units.</p>	<p>Planning for biodiversity at the early stage in plans and developments reduces costs and risks of delays.</p>

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<p>The strategy proposes to support biodiversity recovery and enhance natural environments, with a focus on council-owned land and council functions. Objectives include linking to climate change delivery through nature-based solutions.</p>	<p>Actions include nature-based solutions such as tree planting and management of natural habitats to support carbon sequestration, plus the use of natural solutions to support climate adaptation – e.g. tree planting for cooling areas and watercourses, planting to reduce flooding.</p>	<p>Generally biodiversity enhancement supports climate and other environmental goals. There may be trade-offs to consider in relation to carbon uptake by different tree species, with some native species taking longer to deliver carbon benefits while some non-native species potentially offer greater carbon benefits in the short term which may help support net zero targets.</p>	<p>Consider an adaptive approach that delivers multiple benefits to support a range of outcomes – e.g. mixed planting that delivers both biodiversity and carbon benefits.</p>

Key considerations	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<p>The strategy proposes to support biodiversity recovery and enhance natural environments, with a focus on council-owned land and council functions.</p>	<p>The strategy aims to support the environment and therefore delivers significant benefits.</p>	<p>Competition for land will require a considered approach to deliver multiple goals and ensure that wider objectives, e.g. agriculture, are also supported.</p>	<p>Seek multi-functional land uses where appropriate to deliver multiple outcomes.</p>

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 January 2024

Here to Help – Progress Update



Councillor Victoria Wilson, Cabinet member for Communities and Culture said,

“As a county council, we want to do everything we can to support people to lead happy and independent lives, but recognise too that some residents also may need a little extra hand to help with increasing costs over the colder months.

“Our Holiday Activity & Food programme has for example already supported 199,000 free sessions for eligible children and our Here to Help campaign has signposted people to the wider financial and community support they

may benefit from.

“We have worked collaboratively with our partners across all the district and borough councils to ensure we can work together to make sure we target people who may need the help and will continue to do so over the winter and spring months.”

Report Summary:

Ensuring our residents live in thriving and sustainable communities is one of the top priority outcomes within our Strategic Plan 2022-26. To support that priority this report provides a progress update on the range of support, initiatives and signposting activities which have been undertaken by the County Council to enable our residents to manage cost of living pressures over the last 12 months.

The report outlines our approach to supporting residents along with work which has been undertaken by front line service areas as part of their “business as usual” activities. Furthermore, it also includes a summary of the work we are doing with the Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) and updates on the joint work we are involved with through the Cost of Living Partnership Group (COLPG) work and next steps for consideration.

Recommendations

This report recommends that Cabinet:

- a. Notes how the County Council has supported Staffordshire residents to manage cost-of-living pressures.
- b. Agrees the proposed next steps set out in paragraph 19.
- c. Notes and supports that the continued delivery of the County Council's Strategic plan through investment in early years provision, education, skills, training and by attracting first class businesses to the county, while supporting existing businesses to thrive and prosper, will support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents.

Cabinet – Wednesday 17 January 2024

Here to Help – Progress Update

Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

This report recommends that Cabinet:

- a. Notes how the County Council has supported Staffordshire residents to manage cost-of-living pressures.
- b. Agrees the proposed next steps set out in paragraph 19.
- c. Notes and supports that the continued delivery of the County Council's Strategic plan through investment in early years provision, education, skills, training and by attracting first class businesses to the county, while supporting existing businesses to thrive and prosper, will support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Reasons for Recommendations:

Introduction:

1. The County Council continues to prioritise support to vulnerable residents facing cost-of-living pressures. Our approach has focussed on ensuring our communities are enabled to help themselves and each other and making it as easy as possible to find the information they need to do this.
2. Key to this approach is working in partnership with our local authority and Voluntary and Community Sector Partners. In December 2022, the Staffordshire Leaders Board agreed to the establishment of a Cost-of-Living Partnership Group, with representatives from the County, Borough, and Districts, with the aim of ensuring a joined-up approach where possible.
3. Prior to this and across 2022-23 the County Council's leadership role included providing residents with information, advice, and signposting to local community support. This included a focus on our residents helping themselves and each other, as well as linking with partners to co-ordinate efforts where possible.

4. To achieve this, we created the 'Here to Help' campaign and a new section on our website which collated advice, guidance, and support into a single place. We also made sure that any associated programmes and funding were linked and well communicated to residents, businesses, the VCSE sector, to maximise the support available. Support and advice were also communicated internally to our staff.
5. Since the 'Here to Help' approach first launched there has also been significant support provided across the county by our VCSE partners and by communities supporting each other.
6. This report provides an opportunity for the County Council to consider progress to date and look ahead to those key next steps, before also taking an update back to the Staffordshire Leaders Board to explore further opportunities for joint working.
7. This report includes a summary of the support and guidance that has been made available to residents. Also included is an overview of the Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) 'Cost-of-living Data Project' and progress update on the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group.
8. The report makes several recommendations for consideration including continued signposting for individuals and communities, supplemented by targeted interventions made available through existing programmes, continued investment in education and skills to support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents and working closely with partners.

Here-to-Help Progress Update:

9. This report highlights a selection of key initiatives and support that have been delivered to date, with further details in Appendix 1 - Cost-of-living support – Progress Update.

Here to Help Campaign

10. In October 2022 the County Council launched the '**Here to Help**' campaign, which underpins our approach to supporting residents with cost-of-living pressures.
11. A summary of key highlights between October 2022 - June 2023 is set out below and more detail can be found in Appendix 1 and 2:
 - a. **21,000+ people visited** the web area with **71,000+ total page views**.
 - b. **171 mentions in the wider media** with stories covered on television by BBC Midlands Today and ITV Central.

- c. **1,600 clicks** through to the webpages generated from our 57 social media posts reaching **approximately 83,000 people**.
 - d. **6,500+** Staffordshire residents engaged with Here to Help email newsletter.
 - e. **18,000+ leaflets were distributed** for people who may be digitally excluded.
12. A renewed **Here to Help** campaign (phase 2) for winter 2023/24 winter is outlined in Appendix 3.

Associated Programmes & Funding

13. Additional pre-existing campaigns and programmes have further complemented our Here to Help approach, providing additional practical support to residents. These are outlined below, with more information included at Appendix 1 (Section 2).
- a. **Holiday Activity & Food programme** - Free activities for school aged children in Easter, Summer, and Christmas holidays. To date providers across the County have enabled 199,000 free places to children.
 - b. **Household Support Fund** - Supporting those households facing financial hardship to meet essential costs such as food and utilities. The County Council has been allocated £27.5m (including 2023/24) to support vulnerable residents. 290,457 people have benefitted during the last two years.
 - c. **Members Community Fund** – Approximately £1m allocated to assist local organisations, and in turn supporting residents with cost-of-living pressures.
 - d. **Community Recovery Fund** – 51 applications for assistance approved with £186,000 awarded to VCSE groups and organisations during 2022/23, helping residents to recover from the pandemic's impact and address cost-of-living pressures.
 - e. **Warmer Homes Scheme** - Installation of over 450 heating solutions to residents' homes across the County, resulting in an estimated saving of £650,000 for residents on their annual heating bills.

Front Line Service Support

14. Front line community-facing services continue to provide significant support to residents managing cost-of-living pressures. Some of this activity has been delivered alongside the wider support offered above and through business-as-usual activity. This includes:
- a. **County Council and Community Managed Libraries** - Providing warm welcoming spaces to residents, as well as saving families an

estimated £60,000 since 2020 by providing Pre-Loved Uniform Markets.

- b. **Family Hubs** - Collecting and distributing toys for children and families over the Christmas period. Our Family Hubs have also been administering and delivering the Household Support Fund.
- c. **Community Learning Service** - Providing free adult learning courses to help residents up-skill and/or re-train to enhance their income and career objectives.
- d. **Business and Enterprise Team** - Providing support to businesses via the "Growth Hubs".
- e. **Armed Forces Community** - Supported with dedicated information and guidance as well as support from the Veterans Foundation Grant Scheme.

Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) - Cost-of-living Data Project

- 15. The SCDA has undertaken a project commissioned by Public Health to source and combine datasets with the view of providing greater insight on households who are at risk of becoming, or are already vulnerable, due to the cost-of-living pressures.
- 16. The next stage of the project is to use the data gathered to further engage with colleagues and partners, including Borough and District Councils, to understand the impact of the work, and what actions can be taken. The idea being that partners can better target resources at a local level, to both enable households to manage cost-of-living pressures and to hopefully prevent them needing future support. Ultimately, this approach should assist with building more sustainable and resilient communities.

Cost-of-living Partnership Group

- 17. The Cost-of-Living Partnership Group (COLPG) was created at the request of the Staffordshire Leaders Board and includes representatives from the County Council and all district and borough partners. The group has met during 2023 to explore opportunities for joint working and share good practice and learning. The group propose to undertake the following over the next 6 months:
 - a. Continue to promote a collaborative and joined up approach with Borough & District partners, enabling signposting of residents to sources of advice and support as applicable.
 - b. Continue to promote the "Here to Help" campaign and explore opportunities for Borough & District partners to jointly support this.
 - c. Provide progress updates on the work of the COLPG.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

18. This report summarises the work that has been undertaken during the last year, by the County Council in collaboration with Borough, and District partners, VCSE partners and within our communities, to support residents with the ongoing cost-of-living pressures.
19. It is recommended that Cabinet notes how the County Council has enabled Staffordshire residents to manage cost-of-living pressures and agrees the proposed next steps:
 - a. Use the data collated by the Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA) Project and work with partners to support targeted activity.
 - b. Measure the impact of the Winter Here to Help campaign.
 - c. Continue to work jointly through the Cost-of-living Partnership Group, providing an update to the Staffordshire CEOs Group and Leaders Board.

Legal Implications

20. N/A

Resource and Value for Money Implications

21. The continued delivery of the County Councils Strategic plan through investment in early years provision, education, skills, training and by attracting first class businesses to the county, while supporting existing businesses to thrive and prosper, will support the long-term prosperity of Staffordshire residents.
22. The Here to Help campaign has been resourced by the Communications team.

Climate Change Implications

23. Installation of over 450 heating solutions to residents' homes across the County through the Warmer Homes Scheme, has reduced the number of homes with inefficient heating which has helped to reduce carbon emissions.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Staffordshire County Council – Cost-of-living Progress Update
Appendix 2 – Here to Help Campaign – Communications Summary 22/23
Appendix 3 – Here to Help Campaign – Winter 2023/24

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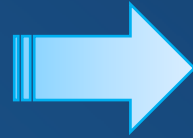
Staffordshire County Council

Cost of Living: Progress Update

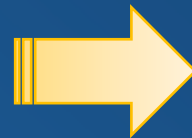
October 2023

Contents

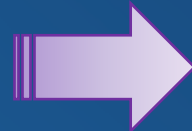
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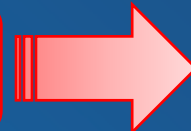
2 Funding & Resources



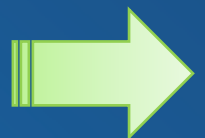
3 Front Line Service Activities



4 Support for Businesses



5 Internal Collaborative Initiatives



Campaigns & Programmes

Here to Help Campaign

- **Here to Help Campaign was launched** in October 2022 which established.
- Provided a "**Here to Help Hub**" van supporting residents in Newcastle & The Moorlands providing a range of Cost of Living support.
- Provides an **online benefit checker** for residents to check if there is any additional money they are entitled to claim.
- Provides residents with information on their **nearest local free food bank** or wider food provider.
- Provides advice to residents on **securing free sanitary products**.
- Provides advice to residents to apply for **free school meals**.
- Provides signposting to the **Holiday Activities & Food provision** available from the Council.
- Provides advice to residents on **Eating Well on a budget** and signposts to Staffordshire Connects Service
- Provides advice and **signposting to residents to help with applying for Pension Credit** via the DWP
- Provides advice and signposting to **help residents who are carers and any additional income** they may be entitled to.
- Provided advice to residents on **government provided Cost of Living payments**.
- Provides advice to residents to help them **secure social tariffs** for their home broadband to enable cheaper access to the internet.
- Signposts to advice agencies to assist households **struggling with debts** to seek debt advice.
- Provides advice to Businesses to access **help with energy costs**.
- Signposts to **free NHS health checking services**
- Provides advice to help residents to **secure free seasonal flu jabs**.
- Provides advice on **helping residents to stay more active**.
- Provides advice to residents to help them **secure free gym passes**.
- Provides information for residents on **accessing local support via the Staffordshire Connects** online community directory.
- Continues to **promote cost of living activities and actions being undertaken by local community groups** and commissioned partners.
- Between October and June – Here to Help webpages have been **visited by over 21k people with 71k total page views**.





Here to Help Campaign

- Campaign has been promoted via social media with **57 messages** on our corporate social media channels which **resulted in 1600 clicks and reached over 83k people.**
- The campaign has received mentions in **171 media / press stories** highlighting support for residents. **81% of stories were positive.**
- Has been promoted to those who are **digitally excluded** with **over 18k leaflets being printed** and distributed via food banks, community hubs, libraries, police & fire, and rescue.
- **14,147 residents received a special My Staffordshire e-mail** focussing on the Cost of Living
- **4,704 internal employees also had a special cost of living e-mail** sent to them.
- A dedicated Cost of Living area has been set up on Staff Space which has been **visited by 1,662 colleagues.**
- A dedicated group has also been established on Yammer internal social media channel which to date has **170 members.**

Holiday Activities & Food Programme

- Has provided **free activities and food** for low income families during school holidays.
- As of March 2023 - HAF has **50 providers** across the County.
- As of March 2023 - HAF has provided **138,746 free places** for activities.



Staffordshire Connects Directory

- Provides signposting to a range of **Cost of Living support services** via the online directory including:
 - **Money** Advice Services
 - **Housing** Advice Services
 - **Food** Support
 - **Furniture Banks**
 - **Home Energy** Advice
 - **Legal** Advice
 - **Employment** Advice
 - **IT / Internet** Support

Funding & Resources

Household Support Fund – 2022/2023

The Fund has provided **204,813 food vouchers** since October 2022



Funding from the Household Support Fund has so far assisted **138,431 households** with cost of living support.



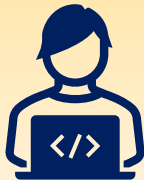
The Fund has provided **187,737 food vouchers** to support families during school holidays.



The Fund has provided **214,595 Utilities Vouchers**



The Fund has been able to support **8,977 people** through **direct enquiries** to the Household Support Fund e-mail.



Funding has enabled the supply of **1400 slow cookers** to vulnerable residents in Newcastle as well as advice on how best to use the items and budget.



Households getting Council Tax Support received a **£125 voucher** to help with the cost of food or fuel.



The fund has continued to work in partnership with **Beat the Cold & Staffordshire Community Foundation** to provide **Winter Warmth Project**



Household Support Fund – 2023/2024

Staffordshire County Council has been allocated an **additional £11 million** to for the Household Support Fund for 2023/24



The Fund will provide **£120 per eligible child** via supermarket e-vouchers throughout 2023/24.



The Fund Will **provide £200 per child leaving our care** and moving into adulthood via supermarket e-vouchers throughout 2023/24



Households may also benefit from an **additional £65 supermarket voucher** plus £20 per additional dependant via the Professionals referral scheme.



The Fund Will continue to provide funds in partnership with **Beat the Cold & Staffordshire Community Foundation** to provide **Winter Warmth Project**



Members Community Fund

In 2022 MCF applications had a value of **£1 million to Community organisations to support residents** in their local area with challenges such as the cost of living



Into 2023 MCF's remit is to provide assistance to Community groups providing support to residents including assisting with cost of living pressures.

Community Recovery Fund

Approved 51 applications and paid out **£186,000 to VCSE groups** supporting residents with the challenges of the rising cost of living and recovering from the Pandemic.

Warmer Homes Scheme

£5.6m scheme which has so far **installed over 450 heating solutions** saving residents and estimated £650k on their heating bills and made 91% of those homes more energy efficient.

Front Line Service Activities

Library Services

Have provided a **Pre-Loved Uniform Market (PLUM)** in some areas which has saved families an estimated **£60,000** since 2020.



Have provided **Community Help Points** for residents where Cost of Living Advice can be accessed.

Have provided **Warm Spaces** in Libraries where residents could go to save them having to heat their own house as well as **access support and advice**.

Have provided **free WIFI**.



Facilitate the **Council's DONATE IT** scheme and distribute IT equipment to eligible enabling them to access work, training, financial support and more.



Some Libraries have **IT Buddies** who can help people to get online, access cost of living support and apply for benefits / financial support.

Have provided Provide **free Baby rhyme times** so new parents don't need to pay.



Libraries provide **free access to COBRA** which provides business resources for residents who might be looking to start their own business.

Have provided Provide a range of **free e-magazines and e-newspapers** where SCC pay the subscription costs, so residents don't have to - saving them money.

Have provided **free public access PC's** in all Council and Community Managed

Children's Centres

Have **collected and distributed toys at Christmas** to help parents struggling to afford presents.



One centre has established a "**Community Table**" to offer free supplies and food to parents struggling to buy things as well as providing advice on further support.

Have engaged with the DWP and **provided a place for benefits drop** in sessions for families to attend and get advice to maximise their income / address benefits issues.

Into 2023 Children's Centres are working on providing **free toothbrush and oral hygiene packs** to families who are vulnerable or on lower incomes under the "**SMILE**" project.

Have been working with an organisation called Period Power to **provide free sanitary products** to women in their areas under the "period poverty" agenda.

Have been Link families in with **uniform and baby banks** which provide free pre-loved clothing for families who are struggling to afford to buy new.

Have Provided "**back to basics**" **sessions run by volunteers for families** where financial support and advice is provided and explained.

Family Hubs

Deliver & Administer the **Household Support Fund** for the County.

Have **donations of food** through the People's Pantry which distribute to families in need.

In 2023 there will be **Family Hub Coaches** who will be providing 1:1 and group workshops around budget management.

Provide **information, advice and signposting assistance** to families needing support with their finances.

Public Health Team

Have Provided **free weight management classes** via Everybody Health Staffordshire and Better Health Staffordshire to vulnerable individuals who aren't able to afford to pay for the gym.

In October 2022 Public Health & Everybody Health Staffordshire worked with **1200 residents under the "Stoptober" programme** to help them to quit smoking and promoted the money saving potentials of it.

Trading Standards Team

Trading Standards Teams have provided **advice to businesses and residents** to be **aware of financial scams** as the Cost of Living pressures increased.



Trading Standards have continually engaged with residents to make them **aware of postal & e-mail scams** over 2022 to stop criminals exploiting the cost of living crisis.

Trading Standards Joined the **#SleighNoToLoanSharks campaign** encouraging residents not to turn to loan sharks to pay for presents at Christmas and provided advice on alternative support available.



Community Learning Service

Provided **free adult learning courses** to enable residents to up-skill and enhance their career prospects and secure higher paid employment.



Secured £4.2m from "Multiply Scheme" to **deliver free numeracy courses** including budgeting advice to help manage the Cost of Living pressures.



Armed Forces Support

Communications promoted the **"Here to Help"** website and **support available to the Armed Forces Community** to ensure they were aware of information available to meet the Cost of Living pressures.

The County Council has provided funding support to community groups supporting Armed Forces Veterans via the **"Veterans Foundation Grant Scheme"** - £14m has been provided since 2016.

Support for Businesses

Skills & Employability Team

Have provided **free advice and support to businesses** to help manage the cost of living pressures by providing advice to **manage and reduce energy costs** in 2022.

The team have initiated the **"Start & Grow Scheme"** which is aimed at people looking to start or grow their own business to face the cost of living pressures.

Have established skills programmes for businesses to help up-skill their workforces - initiated the **"Restart"** and **"Skills Bootcamp"** schemes which workers could utilise to improve skills.

Provided advice via the **Staffordshire Means Business scheme** with elements such as a **Redundancy and Recruitment Triage service** to try to assist people into alternative jobs where there has been redundancy.

Staffordshire
Means
Business



Provided assistance to businesses under Staffordshire Means Business with regards **free workplace health checks** for workers.

Business Enterprise Support Team

Have provided support to the **Business Start-up Hubs in Libraries** by providing free advice via Coaches from Business Enterprise Support (BES) team.



SEND Transport

Support has been provided by the County Council to our SEND Transport providers via an additional **£1.89m in March 23 to offset the cost of living** pressures those companies are facing.



Staffordshire Business Environment Network (SBEN)

In 2022/23 SBEN helped **33 businesses to cut their energy costs** via use of "Low Carbon Business Evolution" Project grants.

In 2023/24 Businesses will be able to benefit from free support from SBEN to continue to **cut their carbon emissions and reduce energy costs** to assist with cost of living pressures.

Internal Collaborative Initiatives

Has provided advice to residents via the **Staffordshire Connects online directory** which has its own Cost of Living support pages.



The Council has established a **Cost of Living Partnership Group** with representatives from each local authority in the County and meets to share and discuss best practice to help residents meet Cost of Living issues.

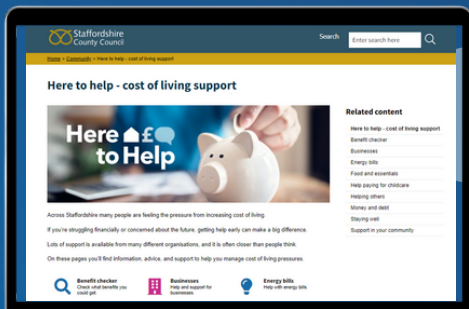
The **Staffordshire Centre for Data Analytics (SCDA)** has established a Cost of Living Data Project to use data sets to enable better targeting of households at risk of being vulnerable to Cost of Living pressures ongoing.



Staffordshire
CENTRE FOR DATA ANALYTICS

Here to Help

Communications Activity 2022/23



The "Here to Help" webpage was established to share IAG and signposting.

We promoted the Here to Help scheme on social media sharing stories and directing people to the webpages



We generated
171
Press Stories

81% were positive

We created
57
Posts

Reached
83k
People

Generated
1.6k
Link clicks

It was promoted to those who are digitally excluded with over 18k leaflets being printed and distributed via food banks, community hubs, libraries, police & fire, and rescue



18,903

Residents and colleagues received an email sharing information about the cost of living crisis.



yammer

Page 97

A Yammer page was set up for employees with 170 members. 1662 members also read the news items on StaffsSpace

Here to Help

Winter 2023/24

Website Refresh

Ready for winter 2023/24



Here to help - cost of living support



Across Staffordshire many people are feeling the pressure from increasing cost of living.

If you're struggling financially or concerned about the future, getting help early can make a big difference.

Lots of support is available from many different organisations, and it is often closer than people think.

On these pages you'll find information, advice, and support to help you manage cost of living pressures.



Benefit checker

Check what benefits you could get.



Businesses

Help and support for businesses.



Energy bills

Help with energy bills.



Food and essentials

Help with food and essentials.



Funded childcare

Help paying for childcare.



Helping others

How to help others.



Money and debt

Help with money and debt.



Staying well

Help to stay well.



Support in your local community

Help finding local support.

Related content

[Here to help - cost of living support](#)

[Benefit checker](#)

[Businesses](#)

[Energy bills](#)

[Food and essentials](#)

[Help paying for childcare](#)

[Helping others](#)

[Money and debt](#)

[Staying well](#)

[Support in your community](#)

Collateral in Community Spaces



Social Media



Media Pipeline

Week 1 23rd October	Week 2 30th October	Week 3 6th November	Week 4 13th November
Warm Spaces in Libraries Share info that libraries are providing Warm Spaces where residents can go to save them having to heat their own house and access support and advice	Online benefit checker case study For residents to check if there is any additional money, they may claim.	Community Help Points Direct people to community help points to get local support with cost of living.	Free Classes in Libraries Promote the free classes that libraries are running during the cost-of-living crisis.

Media Pipeline

Week 5 20 th November	Week 6 27 th November	Week 7 4 th December	Week 8 11 th December
<p>Staffordshire Warmer Homes Promote the SWH scheme to residents who are living in rural areas. Get case study and link into cost of living.</p>	<p><u>Childrens</u> Centres</p> <p>Toy Donation Promote the children's centres toy donation scheme and share case studies of people who are benefitting if possible.</p> <p> </p>	<p>HAF Registration Opens Signposting to the Holiday Activities & Food provision available from the Council. Registration is now open for Jan 2nd – Jan 5th.</p>	<p>Free Affordable Things to Do in Staffordshire this Christmas Work with <u>enjoy</u> Staffordshire to highlight some of the fun free things that people can do in Staffordshire.</p>

Media Pipeline

Week 9 18th December	Week 10 25th December	Week 11 1st January
Staffordshire Means Business Highlight one of the key offers for businesses from the Staffordshire Means Business Scheme	Christmas Communities a Christmas – How communities support each other. Community Fund – buying Christmas Lights <u>for switch</u> on.	HAF Case Study Capture a case study from the January 2023 HAF programme. Are there any unique HAF programmes that would let us film to promote the <u>offer</u> .



Internal Campaign

Signpost to information and support on the intranet.

Employees can benefit from a partnership with Salary Finance, a financial wellbeing company that offers tools, videos and resources to help with budgeting and planning, as well as low / no interest loans repaid through salaries.

Webinars throughout winter to help staff budget.

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 17 January 2024

Service Provision of Temporary and Interim Staff Resources



Councillor Alan White, Leader of the Council said,

"We have over 3,000 valued full-time equivalent employees at the county council; however we do need temporary employees for a variety of reasons and most notably in front line service areas. This supports us in ensuring we are highly flexible and respond to the needs of our teams as soon as possible. We have in place a sourcing organisation to streamline this process which is well regarded by agency suppliers due to its fair payment processes."

Report Summary:

The report outlines the requirements to recontract for a provision to supply temporary and interim human resources (agency workers) to the County Council to provide cover for vital frontline services. It provides background details on the current provider and the benefits of awarding through an established framework to retain the current provider for the next 3 years with the option to extend for 1 year.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Continue to operate a neutral vendor model for the provision of temporary and interim human resources.
- b. Awards and enters into a 3 + 1 year call-off contract from Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework agreement 653F_23 – Managed Services for Temporary Agency Resources (MSTAR4) with Comensura.

Cabinet – Wednesday 17 January 2024

Service Provision of Temporary and Interim Staff Resources

Recommendations of the Leader of the Council

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Continue to operate a neutral vendor model for the provision of temporary and interim human resources.
- b. Awards and enters into a 3 + 1 year call-off contract from Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework agreement 653F_23 – Managed Services for Temporary Agency Resources (MSTAR4) with Comensura.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. The County Council is one of the largest employers in the county, employing 3,366 Full Time Equivalent.. The County Council makes use of temporary and interim Human Resources for a variety of reasons but in the main to provide the right flexible cover across all directorates and sub units including regulated services in the organisation. To
2. Temporary staffing is a vital resource for the County Council; whilst it is a significant area of expenditure it forms a valuable, highly flexible key resource to assist the County Council in delivering important frontline services.
3. The current call-off contract for the County Council Vendor Neutral provider is IA1564 Temporary and Interim Human Resources for the Period: 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023, with an option to extend to 31 March 2024 is with Comensura. This call-off contract was procured through the ESPO Managed Services for Temporary Agency Resources Framework Agreement 653F_15 MSTAR3 on ESPO's terms and conditions. The extension period has been utilised.

4. Vendor Neutral providers, such as Comensura, do not provide temporary workers directly but draw resources from a large supply base to fulfil orders. They engage other providers of agency staff to become approved providers to the County Council and manage the supply chain. Those providers meeting minimum standards in terms of business suitability compete equally against others in the locality to supply temporary workers to the County Council departments, irrespective of their size or reputation which gives local SMEs & BAMs (Bidding and Allocation Management (armed forces booking system)) the opportunity to provide services.
5. Comensura use a web-based electronic system to communicate temporary staffing requirements to the County Council's list of potential suppliers providing access to e-procurement and the efficiency brought by that provision.
6. Around 50 different employment agencies supply temporary human resources to the County Council through Comensura, and a number of self-employed workers contract with Comensura via their own Limited Company.
7. Using this approach to source agency workers has over time achieved significant non-cashable process and administration savings using consolidated invoices, automation of time sheets, time spent procuring and negotiating with suppliers, time spent collating job specifications / selection of candidates and resources required to check compliance on insurance, credit rating, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), etc.
8. The arrangement is internally mandated, requiring all hiring managers to use the service and not deal directly with agencies.
9. With the current call-off contract coming to an end, the County Council has been reviewing its requirements with a view to planning future service provision.
10. It is proposed that a 3 +1 year call-off contract from Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework agreement 653F – Managed Services for Temporary Agency Resources (MSTAR4) is entered into with Comensura for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2028 inclusive of extension period.
11. The reasons underpinning the recommended procurement route include:
 - a. A compliant procurement route (Comensura appointed via a framework agreement).

- b. Use of ESPO terms and conditions of call-off contract which are in the County Council's favour and offer protection (e.g. introduction fees, liabilities etc).
- c. The current model has proven to be successful for the County Council as it provides a wide range of agency staff through an extensive and robust supply chain, whilst enabling social value through providing SMEs & BAMs opportunities to provide services.
- d. The provision will meet stringent safeguarding requirements and offers value for money.
- e. Visibility of workers in spend and Management Information reports.

12. Alternative options have been considered such as:

- a. bringing the service in-house; there is no in-house facility to provide this service, it would be costly and require considerable resource to deliver. It would take significant time to build relationships with agencies and require expert management.
- b. WMTemps was considered at the start of our procurement exercise but it was identified that Opus, who are the service provider, are a master vendor. The neutral vendor model is the SCC preferred model as it has proven to be successful in the past and adds value to the local community and it doesn't fall into MSTAR4.
- c. doing nothing and allowing managers to source agency workers directly; there would be no measures in place to ensure service quality, agency fees would be potentially elevated as prices would be subject to market conditions with no control over increases or terms and conditions, reduce transparency of management information and could ultimately breach procurement regulations as spend with one provider may exceed procurement thresholds.
- d. Going out to full tender; this would take considerable time, approximately 12 months and require additional resource to manage. In addition, the cost of change is greater than potential cost savings that could be achieved should Comensura not be awarded the contract
- e. Using other call off contracts; the Council have utilised MSTAR2 and MSTAR3 for the previous two procurement exercises for this service and has proven to be successful. The MSTAR4 framework agreement was the most recent of the framework agreements considered and its procurement process involved input from local authorities to identify key requirements. This should ensure that the most competitive rates

are available. Experience of using the MSTAR4 agreement has been positive.

13. The Comensura arrangement has been a success and is working well with further scope for service improvements. Comensura have been proactive to work with our services to reduce spend and to source hard to fill posts. They have met the KPIs set in the current call-off contract which can be viewed in Appendix 2. Most notably Comensura have a proven track record in fulfilling job roles (99.4% over the last two years of the contract, exceeding the SLA of 98%), which has impacts on both the wellbeing of staff where welfare would be compromised if posts were unfulfilled and consistency of service. In addition,
 - a. Comensura conduct a 6 monthly audit of all suppliers that are supplying candidates,
 - b. Comensura have also supported on the introduction of a 'Statement of Works' solution for social care which plugged a large gap in resource requirement at a critical time,
 - c. Discussions have taken place with Comensura with a view to further improvements, for instance, more activity around refining the suppliers to each category and where needed reaching out to new suppliers in the market, particularly for hard to fill roles in Childrens Services, Social Care, Legal, ICT.
14. There are additional benefits of remaining with the current provider, these include:
 - a. Comensura is well regarded by agency suppliers due to their fair payment processes, ability to offer additional opportunity with other customers, efficient process management / systems and personalised supplier relationship management.
 - b. Comensura along with Veolia have been announced as 2023 winners of the TIARA Talent Solutions Diversity, Equality & Inclusion awards. These awards recognise companies across the RPO, MSP and talent solutions market. Comensura demonstrated clear metrics for success actions and measurable results across a wide spectrum of Diversity Equality and Inclusion
 - c. In August 2023 Comensura hosted a Prison Collaboration Day at their Luton Office with Prison Employment Leads from Drake Hall, Featherstone and Chelmsford as their leadership team are a part of their Employment Advisory Board. SCC could draw on this expertise

and approach to create an awareness of opportunities with SCC. This can be through direct recruitment or our open-door program.

- d. Comensura has been partnering with New Futures Network and HM Prison & Probation Services to help prisoners reintegrate into society and employment. We can target potential talent using open door programs.

Legal Implications

15. ESPOs MSTAR4 Framework is compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The County Council was named within the OJEU Notice as a participant. The County Council's Procurement Regulations provide for the use of a framework where appropriate. The contract with Comensura will be a call-off contract from the MSTAR4 framework agreement. There does not appear to be any notable differences to the terms of this contract to that of the current call-off contract.
16. There do not appear to be any other legal implications at this stage.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

17. The County Council's expenditure on the provision of agency workers is in the region of £7-8million per annum which is up to 4.47% of the Council's total projected pay bill in 2023/24 of £179.4m per year.
18. Over the full term of the recommended contract, it is anticipated that the annual value will be £8 million, equating to approximately £32million over the full term. This is an increase of £4 million (14.29%). The majority of this spend is used to support vital Children's services. Appendix 1 outlines Usage and Spend for 2020-2023 YTD.
19. Due to current levels of inflation and rises in salaries across the economy it is not foreseeable that any savings will be achieved in relation to fees and pay rates, indeed the cost of the arrangement is expected to increase if current volumes are sustained.
20. Any significant reduction in spend on this category will only be achieved through reducing the need for temporary staff. There are several interventions in place and planned to deliver a reduction in usage, and therefore expenditure, over the term of the contract, these include;
 - a. delivery of key projects and activity that contributes to the People Strategy Pillar 'Attracting and Keeping Talented People',
 - b. more proactive support to recruit into vacancies,

- c. the identification of temporary staffing which should be transferred to permanent posts,
 - d. robust control of engagement of temporary staff,
 - e. provision of management insight and data to senior managers to facilitate effective usage and management of spend,
 - f. the introduction of a progression scheme for directly employed Childrens Social Workers to improve attraction and retention,
 - g. planned government intervention in the Childrens Social Worker agency market.
21. Engagement with Comensura, is broken into 15 distinct categories of intervention. A closer look at this categorisation reveals that 3 of these are specifically designed for temporary cover while we seek more permanent solutions. The financial implications of these temporary solutions have been examined, with the total cost from 2020 to 2023 inclusive of agency markup and Comensura's own charges amounting to £1.8 million. It is vital to note that this expenditure can be potentially reduced should a permanent resourcing solution be put in place quickly. Therefore, our efforts must be focused on implementing long-term solutions to minimize reliance on these temporary, and often more costly, measures. See Appendix 3
22. Spend is split between the pay rate for the worker, the fee to the agency and the fee to the provider.
23. The fees payable to the provider are set out in the framework agreement – currently £0.20 per hour. Comensura charge this transaction fee per hour booked via the call-off contract. For the 12 months April 22 – March 23 this equated to approx. £40K which approx. 0.6% of the total spend through the call-off contract for the same period.
24. Agency fees are negotiated by Comensura and held at agreed rates for all transactions across the County Council. The agency fee will vary dependent on supply and role.
25. Due regard should also be given to a race to the bottom with rates which would provide a false economy where the focus should be on addressing the reduction in use of temporary staffing across the County Council.

26. Following pricing evaluation, including verification by ESPO, of all the providers on the MSTAR4 framework, Comensura came out as the best value for money supplier.
27. It is proposed that the call-off contract would be for 3 years with the option of extending for 1 year, for the following reasons:
- This will prompt a continuous review of the market and model of provision enabling change or retention at key points in time.
 - The agreement with Comensura is now well established (with contracts since 2012) and captures most if not all the expenditure on this provision.

Climate Change Implications

28. Comensura is a subsidiary of the Impellam Group Plc and is committed to achieving Net Zero Emissions by 2050. Impellam Group PLC and its operating companies in the United Kingdom have stated they are committed to protecting the environment by demonstrating high standards of environmental responsibility in all of their operations and minimise the environmental impacts associated with their activities and services.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1: [Agency Worker Usage and Spend Financial Year 2020-2023 Year To date](#)

Appendix 2: [Comensura KPIs](#)

Appendix 3: Comensura [Spend By Category 2020-2023](#)

Contact Details

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Forward Plan of Key Decisions - 21 February 2024 - 19 June 2024

The Forward Plan of Key Decisions is prepared on a monthly basis and published at least 28 days before the start of the period covered. Key Decisions are defined as those Executive decisions which are likely:

- a. to result in the County Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the relevant budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or
- b. to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions in the County's area.

The Forward Plan will contain **all** matters which the Leader of the Council has reason to believe will be the subject of a Key Decision to be taken by the Cabinet. It may also include decisions that are not key decisions but are intended to be determined by the Cabinet. Part of the Cabinet meetings listed in this Forward Plan may be held in private where a report for the meeting contains exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended) and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it. If you would like to make representations about any particular decision to be conducted in private then please email: michael.bradbury@staffordshire.gov.uk. Such representations must be received in advance 6 clear working days before the date on which the decision is scheduled to be taken.

The Membership of the Cabinet consists of:

Leader of the County Council – Alan White
 Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills – Philip White
 Cabinet Member for Health and Care – Julia Jessel
 Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change – Simon Tagg
 Cabinet Member for Commercial Matters – Mark Deaville
 Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport – David Williams
 Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources – Ian Parry
 Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture – Victoria Wilson
 Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Mark Sutton
 Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) – Jonathan Price
 Cabinet Support Member for Highways – Robert Pritchard
 Cabinet Support Member for Public Health and Integrated Care – Paul Northcott

A copy of the Forward Plan of Key Decisions may be inspected, free of charge, at the Member and Democratic Services office, County Buildings, Martin Street, Stafford, during normal office hours Monday to Friday. A copy of the notice will also be available on Staffordshire County Council's Website at <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/>.

Documents submitted for decision will be a formal report which will be available on the County Council's website at least 5 clear working days before the date the decision is to be made, unless that report is subject to any prohibition or restriction on its disclosure. Other relevant background documents used in compiling the report will also be made available in the same way unless they are subject to any prohibition or restriction on their disclosure. Minutes of Cabinet meetings will be published within three working days and will be subject to call-in. The call-in period lasts for three working days. If the decision is not called-in it will be implemented on the fourth working day. Special urgency items are exempt from call-in.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions - 21 February 2024 - 19 June 2024

Note:

1. The Forward Plan of Key Decisions sets out all Key Decisions intended to be made by Cabinet during the above period.
2. The Cabinet date can be provisional and items may move/roll forward to another meeting date but this will be monitored.
3. Items should remain on the Notice until a decision is made by Cabinet or is formally removed.
4. Where there is an intention to make a decision in private the exemption paragraph relied upon will be included within this notice

Predicted Date of Decision	Public or Private Decision	Title and Description	Consultation	Contact Officer
21 February 2024	Public	Civil Contingencies Policy & Business Continuity Management Policy Leader of the Council (Alan White)	Civil Contingencies Unit	Tracy Thorley (Tel: 01785 276337) Service Area: Corporate Operations
		Staffordshire County Council as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 has a statutory requirement to have up-to-date policies in place outlining the Councils approach to Civil Contingencies.		
21 February 2024	Public	Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 3, 2023/24 Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources (Ian Parry), Leader of the Council (Alan White)	n/a	Wendy Tompson, Rachel Spain (Tel: 01785 854267, Tel: 01785 854455) Service Area: Strategy Team and Finance
		This quarterly Integrated Performance Report provides an overview of Staffordshire County Council's progress and performance in delivering against our Strategic Plan and Corporate Delivery Plan, and our financial position in relation to our Medium Term Financial Strategy.		
21 February 2024	Public	Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion - progress update Leader of the Council (Alan White)	None	Sarah Getley (Tel: 01785 854265) Service Area: People Services
		To provide an update on the Council's approach to Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion and progress over the past 12 months.		

21 February 2024	Public	<p>Lighting and ITS energy contract procurement proposal Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport (David Williams)</p>	N/A	James Bailey (Tel: 01785 276591) Service Area: Highways and the Built County
		<p>A proposal for procuring a new energy framework that would supply electricity to street lighting and Intelligent Transport System (ITS) assets. The contract would be procured through Crown Commercial Services (CCS), which would start 1 April 2024 for four years and provide 100% renewable energy.</p>		
21 February 2024	Public	<p>Procurement of Gas Supplies Cabinet Member for Commercial Matters (Mark Deaville)</p>	None	Ian Turner (Tel: 01785 277228) Service Area: Property
		<p>To decide the arrangements for the purchase of gas supplies from April 2025.</p>		
21 February 2024	Public	<p>Green Solutions – SCC Delivery of the Pilot Business Energy Advice Service Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills (Philip White)</p>	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Philip White. Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills – Darryl Evers. Director for Corporate Services – John Tradewell. Assistant Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills – Anthony Hodge. Economic Strategy Delivery Group. Stoke on Trent City Council – Jon Rouse, City Director	Anthony Hodge (Tel: 01785 277204) Service Area: Business Support
		<p>This report seeks retrospective authority following a Members Decision Notice, for Staffordshire County Council entering into an agreement with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to become the Primary Delivery Partner (PDP) for the Stoke and Staffordshire region, to deliver Energy Assessments and Grants on behalf of the Pilot Business Energy Advice Service (BEAS) programme in the Stoke and Staffordshire region alongside their Green Solutions Programme. This will result in £2.3M being available for investment in our local businesses.</p>		

21 February 2024	Public	<p>Homes for Children in Our Care Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Mark Sutton)</p>	None currently	<p>Natasha Moody (Tel: 07976 191079) Service Area: Placement Service - Wellbeing and Partnerships</p>
		<p>The West Midlands Framework is for residential children's homes for children and young people for access to local authorities and trusts in the West Midlands. It is to provide a safe, stable and nurturing homes for vulnerable children that require residential care.</p>		
21 February 2024	Public	<p>House Waste Recycling Centres - Equipment Replacement Programme Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Simon Tagg)</p>	None	<p>David Atkinson (Tel: 01785 277910) Service Area: Waste and Sustainability</p>
		<p>The purpose of the paper is for Cabinet to approve the spend on the HWRC equipment replacement programme. The HWRC equipment replacement programme and funding model was agreed as part of the HWRC business case to bring the HWRCs back in-house in 2022.</p>		
20 March 2024	Public	<p>Joint Enterprise Legacy Committee Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills (Philip White)</p>	TBC	<p>Anthony Hodge (Tel: 01785 277204) Service Area: Business and Enterprise</p>
		<p>To establish a Joint Committee on behalf of Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council to take all decisions within the budget and policy frameworks for both councils arising from the winding down and cessation of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).</p>		
20 March 2024	Public	<p>Recommissioning of Residential and Nursing Care Homes Cabinet Member for Health and Care (Julia Jessel)</p>	<p>Legal, finance, commercial, ASC operational teams, SARCP and some customer engagement planned</p>	<p>Andrew Jepps (Tel: 01785 278557) Service Area: Care Commissioning -</p>
		<p>Extension to the Dynamic Purchasing System Agreement for the supply of Residential and Nursing Care Home placements, and development, procurement and implementation of a new</p>		

		commissioning model	in the new year	Health and Care
20 March 2024	Public	Staffordshire's Joint All Age Carers Strategy 2024 - 2029 Cabinet Member for Health and Care (Julia Jessel), Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Mark Sutton)	Young and adult carers, including parent carers and families of young carers, social care professionals in the County Council and Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, and the wider public.	Andrew Jepps, Natasha Moody (Tel: 01785 278557, Tel: 07976 191079) Service Area: Health and Care and Children's and Families
		The new All-Age Carers Strategy (2024-2029), which has been jointly developed by Staffordshire County Council and the Integrated Care Board, to be considered		
20 March 2024	Public	Section 75 Agreement for the Provision of Adult Social Care Assessment and Case Management Cabinet Member for Health and Care (Julia Jessel)	Health & Care scrutiny	Amanda Stringer (Tel: 01785 895170) Service Area: Adult Social Care
		Review of Section 75 Agreement for the provision of adult social care assessment and case management		
20 March 2024	Private	Burton Regeneration Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture (Victoria Wilson)	N/A at this stage	Ian Turner (Tel: 01785 277228) Service Area: Communities and culture
		Item relating to the Burton Regeneration works.		
20 March 2024	Public	Capital Programme for Schools 2024/ 25 Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) (Jonathan Price)	None at this stage	Ian Turner (Tel: 01785 277228) Service Area: Strategic Property
		The Capital Programme for Schools 2024/ 2025 consists of SCC's Statement of Priorities for its schools and associated appendices for major projects and maintenance projects. Programme to be approved by Cabinet for commencement/ completion in 2024/ 2025.		

Page 120	20 March 2024	Public	<p>Highways and Transport Capital Programme Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport (David Williams)</p> <p>Details of the proposed capital highway maintenance and transport improvements programme for 2024/25.</p>	Nil	James Bailey (Tel: 01785 276591) Service Area: Highways and the Built County
	20 March 2024	Public	<p>Corporate Delivery Plan 2024/25 Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources (Ian Parry), Alan White</p> <p>This is the proposed Corporate Delivery Plan for 2024/25 outlining Staffordshire County Council's key activities against the Strategic Plan.</p>	N/A	Lynsey Bissell (Tel: 07855 026263) Service Area: Strategy and Transformation
	20 March 2024	Public	<p>Climate Change Strategic Development Framework - Update Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change (Simon Tagg)</p> <p>An update of the existing framework to reflect future ambitions to reduce carbon emissions and improve SCC resilience to the changing climate.</p>	N/A	David Atkinson (Tel: 01785 277910) Service Area: Connectivity and Sustainability
	20 March 2024	Public	<p>Provision of Apprenticeship Services 2024 Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills (Philip White)</p> <p>The report outlines the requirements to change to a new Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) to procure apprenticeship provision. We currently have an agreement with ESPO until September 2024 however they no longer have dedicated apprenticeship framework. The report details the benefits of joining an established DPS.</p>	N/A	Anthony Baines (Tel: 01785 895984) Service Area: Skills and Employability

17 April 2024	Public	<p>Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Mark Sutton)</p> <p>The options paper will outline the current children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing service in Staffordshire and provide potential options for the future of a children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing service, along with a preferred option / recommendation.</p>	TBC	<p>Natasha Moody (Tel: 07976 191079) Service Area: Families and Communities Commissioning Team</p>
17 April 2024	Public	<p>Review of Local Authority Social Care Case Management Systems Cabinet Member for Health and Care (Julia Jessel), Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Mark Sutton)</p> <p>Review of Local authority social care case management systems utilised by Health and Care Children & Families and Finance Services</p>	N/A	<p>Jo Cowcher, Nisha Gupta (Tel: 07772 011078, Tel: 07890 402088) Service Area: Health and Care</p>
17 April 2024	Private	<p>Unregulated Placement Update Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Mark Sutton)</p> <p>Update on the young people in unregulated placements</p>	n/a	<p>Nisha Gupta (Tel: 07890 402088) Service Area: Children and Families</p>
15 May 2024	Public	<p>Community Learning Accountability Agreement 2024-2025 Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills (Philip White)</p> <p>The report provides an update on performance across Community Learning and the opportunity to consult on the Accountability Agreement which lays out priorities and targets for the 2024-2025 academic year. The Accountability Agreement forms the basis of the Council's Adult Education Budget grant agreement with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). It is a funding requirement to seek approval from Cabinet and submit</p>	N/A	<p>Anthony Baines (Tel: 01785 895984) Service Area: Skills & Employability</p>

		the Accountability Agreement to the ESFA by the 30th June 2024 for funding to be released to the Council.		
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