

**Council Agenda**

Thursday 12 October 2023

**10:00**

Council Chamber, County Buildings, Stafford

**To: The Members of the Staffordshire County Council**

Notice is given that the meeting of the Staffordshire County Council will be held in the Council Chamber, County Buildings, Stafford at 10:00 on Thursday 12 October 2023 to deal with the matters set out on the agenda.

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>

Pat Flaherty  
Chief Executive  
4 October 2023

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## **Agenda**

(Note: The meeting will begin with prayers)

### **Part One**

**General Housekeeping and Declaring an Interest** (Pages 1 - 4)

1. **Apologies for absence (if any)**

2. **Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16**

3. **Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 July 2023** (Pages 5 - 20)

4. **Chairman's Correspondence**

The Chairman will mention a range of recent items of news which may be of interest to Members

5. **Petition: Staffordshire County Council decision to take away valuable sports pitches and building** (Pages 21 - 22)

In accordance with the County Councils' petitions scheme, to consider the petition: Staffordshire County Council decision to take away valuable sports pitches and building.

6. **Statement of the Leader of the Council** (Pages 23 - 32)

The Leader will inform the Council about his work and his plans for the Council, and will give an overview of decisions taken by the Cabinet (and Portfolio Holders) since the previous meeting of the Council

7. **Recommendations to the Council**

a) Proposed addition to the Scheme of delegation in relation to the Handling of S53 Applications under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Pages 33 - 36)

b) Potential Appointment of Independent Members to the Audit and Standards Committee / Review of the Audit and Standards Committee Terms of Reference (Pages 37 - 54)

c) Electoral Review of Staffordshire County Council: Draft Recommendations (Pages 55 - 72)

## 8. **Questions**

Questions to be asked by Members of the County Council of the Leader of the Council, a Cabinet Member, or a Chairman of a Committee. The question will be answered by the relevant Member and the Member asking the question may then ask a follow up question which will also be answered

## 9. **Petitions**

An opportunity for Members to present and speak on petitions submitted by their constituents

## 10. **Exclusion of the Public**

The Chairman of the Council will move the following motion so that the County Council can consider confidential business in private:

“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”.

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### **Part Two**

(All reports in this section are on pink paper)

## **Notes for Members of the Press and Public**

### **Filming of Meetings**

Staffordshire County Council is defined as a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act 2018. The County Council has agreed that public meetings should be the subject of live web transmission 'webcasting'. Fixed cameras are located within meeting room for this purpose.

The webcast will be live on the County Council's website and recorded for subsequent play-back for 12 months. The recording will also be uploaded to YouTube. By entering the meeting room and using the seats around the meeting tables you are deemed to be consenting to being filmed and to the

possible use of those images and sound recordings for the purpose of webcasting.

If you have privacy concerns about the webcast or do not wish to have your image captured, then please contact Member and Democratic Services.

### **Recording by Press and Public**

Recording (including by the use of social media) by the Press and Public is permitted from the public seating area provided it does not, in the opinion of the chairman, disrupt the meeting.



## NOTICES FOR COUNCILLORS

### 1. Questions

- 1.1. Questions must be addressed to the Chairman, or to the Leader of the Council or to a Portfolio Holder or to the Chairman of a Committee. Notice in writing of any question must be emailed to the office of the Director of Corporate Services ([michael.bradbury@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:michael.bradbury@staffordshire.gov.uk)) by no later than 1:00 pm on the third working day preceding the Council Meeting i.e. **by not later than 1:00 pm on Monday, 9 October 2023**. All questions and answers will be circulated around the Chamber before the commencement of the meeting.
- 1.2. Questions may be addressed to the Chairman of the Council, the Leader of the Council, any Cabinet Member or a Committee Chairman. The Leader of the Council may refer questions asked of them to the relevant Cabinet Member if they consider it appropriate.
- 1.3. Each Member may submit a maximum of one question each, however only the first 15 questions received by the Director of Corporate Services before the deadline will be dealt with at the meeting. All other questions will receive a written answer.
- 1.4. Questions and written responses will be circulated to all members at the start of each meeting and will be made available online to accompany the webcast but will not be read out at the meeting.
- 1.5. Each questioner will be entitled to ask one supplementary question on their question/answer and the time limit for supplementary questions and answers will be at the sole discretion of the Chairman.

### 2. Notices of Motion

- 2.1. A Notice of Motion must reach, by email, the Director for Corporate Services ([michael.bradbury@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:michael.bradbury@staffordshire.gov.uk)) nine clear days before the relevant Meeting of the Council, i.e. **by not later than midnight on Monday, 2 October 2023**. Further information on Notices of Motion can be found in Paragraph 11 of Section 12 of the Constitution.  
**NB. Notices of Motion for the County Council meeting on 14 December 2023 must reach the Chief Executive by not later than midnight on Monday, 4 December 2023.**

## RULES OF DEBATE

### 3. Speaking at Council Meetings

- 3.1. Councillors shall conduct debate politely and with due respect for others.
- 3.2. Councillors shall not use foul or offensive language.

3.3. As far as is possible, Members should use notes for reference where necessary but should avoid reading directly from a script. This will assist with engagement in debate and the ability of the microphones to pick up the sound.

#### **4. Content and Length of Speeches**

4.1. Subject to Paragraph 4.2 below, no Member may speak for more than five minutes during debates by the Council unless the Chairman gives an extension.

4.2. When the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members nominated by the Leader or Committee Chairmen propose reports to the Council they may speak for up to ten minutes. Members who have been nominated by the Leaders of minority political groups as spokesmen on a report discussed by the Council may also speak for up to ten minutes.

4.3. Members will confine their speeches to the question under discussion or to a personal explanation or a point of order. No Member may question another Member's motives or use offensive expressions to any Member of the Council or Officer.

4.4. The Chairman may call the attention of the Council to continued irrelevancy and tedious repetition or any breach of order by a Member and may direct them to discontinue their speech. If the Member continues to disregard the authority of the Chairman, the Chairman may ask them to retire for the remainder of the sitting. Should a Member refuse to retire the Chairman may order their removal from the meeting.

4.5. The Council operates a 'traffic light' system for speeches. During any speech, the amber light will come on notifying the speaker that they have 60 seconds left.

4.6. Where a Local Member is presenting a petition, they may speak for a maximum of two minutes. The amber light will come on for the final 30 seconds.

4.7. If there is serious disorder or persistent disregard of the authority of the Chairman, the Chairman may, without prejudice to any other powers which they have, direct that the Meeting be suspended for such period as they consider desirable.

## GUIDANCE ON DECLARING DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AT MEETINGS - WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY

### DEFINITION OF WHAT IS A DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST

A 'Disclosable Pecuniary Interest' is an interest of yourself or interest known to the Member of relatives and close associates within the following descriptions:

SUBJECT	DESCRIPTION
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from Staffordshire County Council) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by you or your partner in connection with you carrying out duties as a member or towards your election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract which is made between you or your partner (or a body in which you or your partner has a beneficial interest) and Staffordshire County Council- (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of Staffordshire County Council
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of Staffordshire County Council for a month or longer
Corporate Tenancies	Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) (a) the landlord is Staffordshire County Council and (b) the tenant is a body in which you or your partner has a beneficial interest
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where- (a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of Staffordshire County Council; and (b) either-  (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or  (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you or your partner has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class

You are also required to declare a pecuniary interest if an issue being considered at a meeting where you're present affects your or your partner's personal well being or financial position to a greater extent than it affects that of a member of the general public.

### **WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?**

If you also have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest you must notify the Chairman of that interest and withdraw from the room when the matter is being discussed.

An example of what you should say

*"I have a disclosable pecuniary interest in item number..... on the agenda. The interest is ..... I shall leave the room when that matter is being discussed"*

### **DECLARING INTERESTS AT FULL COUNCIL**

The Code of Conduct only requires that disclosable pecuniary interests are declared where the matter to which the interest relates is being considered. Some items will be mentioned in the papers for Full Council but are not actually being considered by Full Council. In particular, some items are mentioned in the Leader's Statement as having been dealt with in Cabinet but are not actually mentioned or discussed at full Council. In such circumstances the Monitoring Officer's advice to members is that there is no need to declare an interest unless the particular matter is mentioned or discussed. As a general rule, members only need to declare an interest at full Council in the following circumstances:

- Where a matter is before the Council for a decision and/or
- Where the matter in which the member has an interest is specifically mentioned or discussed at the Council meeting.



**Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 20 July 2023**

<b>Attendance</b>		
Jak Abrahams	Philip Hudson	Bob Spencer
Charlotte Atkins	Graham Hutton	Mike Sutherland
Philip Atkins, OBE	Thomas Jay	Mark Sutton
Gill Burnett-Faulkner	Julia Jessel	Stephen Sweeney
Tina Clements	Jason Jones	Simon Tagg
Richard Cox	Peter Kruskonjic	Samantha Thompson
Mike Davies	Tom Loughbrough-Rudd	Carolyn Trowbridge
Janet Eagland	Johnny McMahon	Ross Ward
Ann Edgeller	Paul Northcott	Alan White
Alex Farrell	Jeremy Oates	Philip White
Keith Flunder	Gillian Pardesi	Conor Wileman
John Francis	Ian Parry	Bernard Williams
Colin Greatorex	Kath Perry, MBE	David Williams
Philippa Haden	Bernard Peters	Victoria Wilson
Gill Heath	Robert Pritchard	Mark Winnington
Phil Hewitt	Janice Silvester-Hall	Mike Worthington
Jill Hood	David Smith	Nigel Yates
Derrick Huckfield	Paul Snape	

**Apologies:** Arshad Afsar, Mark Deaville, Syed Hussain, Jeremy Pert, Jonathan Price, Jill Waring and Mike Wilcox.

**Part One**

**14. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16**

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

<b>Member</b>	<b>Minute Nos.</b>	<b>Interest</b>	<b>Reason</b>
John Francis	17	Personal	Local Member for the Division in which the proposed centre for Asylum Seekers is located.

**15. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 May 2023**

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 18 May 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

## **16. Chairman's Correspondence**

### **Pat Flaherty**

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman welcomed Pat Flaherty, the Council's new Chief Executive, to his first meeting of the Council. Members were informed that Mr Flaherty was born and raised in Staffordshire and had served as the Chief Executive at the London Borough of Harrow and also as Chief Executive at Somerset County Council. Pat had worked in local government for 30 years, including 16 years at Councils in Staffordshire.

### **Staffordshire residents recognised in His Majesty The King's Birthday Honours**

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended his congratulations to the following Staffordshire residents who had received honours in His Majesty The King's Birthday Honours:

- Mike Cherry, Burton upon Trent. Lately Chair, Federation of Small Businesses. Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for services to business and international trade.
- Linda Cobb, Burton upon Trent. Principle Manager, Decent and Safe Homes, Derby City Council. Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to housing.
- Suzie Hutchinson, Stafford. Chief Executive of Little Hearts Matter. Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to Children, Adults and their Families with congenital heart defects.
- Lorna Millington, Cannock. Future Networks Manager, Cadent Gas. MBE for services to business and the environment.
- Terry Tricker, Lichfield, MBE for services to communities in Staffordshire.
- Claire Bond. Medallist of the Order of the British Empire (BEM) for services to women policing and communities in Staffordshire.
- Dr Naomi Forrester-Soto, Newcastle. Reader in Vector Biology, Keele University. BEM for services to public communication during Covid-19.
- Kim Smith, Burton Upon Trent. BEM for services to the community in Winshill, particularly during Covid-19.
- George Wright, Stafford. President, Stafford Branch Royal British Legion. BEM for voluntary services to Veterans in Staffordshire.

### **Fundraising – Chairman's Charity 2023/24**

The Chairman informed the Council that his chosen charity for 2023/24 was the Katherine Allport Foundation. Established in 2019, the foundation

celebrated the life of Katherine Allport, who passed away with a rare form of breast cancer aged just 32. The Foundation, established by Katherine's husband and mother, create free, personalised hampers for those starting chemotherapy who live or are receiving treatment in Staffordshire. The hampers ensure the recipient was "chemo ready" as they contain many essential items such as moisturisers, anti-sickness bands, blankets, neck pillows, hand sanitiser and much more. The Chairman added that he would be running a series of events over the next 12 months to raise funds for the charity and would very much welcome Members' support.

The Chairman also invited Councillor Snape to say a few words about the fundraising for his chosen charities during his term as Chairman of the Council. Mr Snape expressed his thanks to those people who had supported his fundraising and confirmed that he had raised £6,953 in total of which £5,000 had been given to the Army Benevolent Fund and £1,953 to the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

## **17. Statement of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council.

### **Staffordshire Means Back to Business - Oral Update**

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Councillor Charlotte Atkins enquired about the progress of the Council's Employment and Skills Strategy and how it would support small businesses. In response, Councillor Philip White indicated that the Strategy was currently out for public consultation and there were therefore opportunities for Members to submit their views and comments. Councillor Alan White added that, in due course, the Skills Hubs would be coming back to the County Council from the Local Enterprise Partnership.

Councillor Smith spoke about the employment opportunities available to the County through promoting the "Green Agenda". In response, Councillor Philip White indicated that he would be bringing an update on the Green Agenda to a future Cabinet Meeting. Councillor Alan White added that Councillor Smith may wish to meet with Councillor Tagg to discuss his thoughts on the opportunities available through the "Green Agenda".

Councillor Yates requested that the Leader of the Council fully engages with the Staffordshire Leaders' Board following changes in the political leadership of some partner authorities following the recent local elections, so as to maximise the opportunities to unlock sites for development. In response, Councillor Alan White indicated that the County Council and the District and Borough Council's working together under the auspices of the

Staffordshire Leaders' Board was the best way of securing their future with Central Government. He added that, since the recent local elections, he had met with all of the new District/Borough Council Leaders across the County.

### **Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) Consultation Feedback, Policy Changes, Re-use and HWRC Network Improvements to Date**

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Councillor Yates referred to the announcement, on 18 June by the Environment Minister, that charges for disposal of DIY materials by households were to be abolished. He also spoke about the opportunities for the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres to take trade waste so as to offset the loss of income from the disposal of household DIY materials. In response, Councillor Tagg indicated that the Council was awaiting the publication of the relevant legislation changes in relation to the abolition of the charges.

Councillor Thompson indicated that she welcomed the proposed introduction of a permit scheme for Staffordshire residents with vans or trailers and that, in future, sites would only accept trade waste from within Staffordshire. She also welcomed the decision to allow parish councils to dispose of hedge trimmings etc at no charge.

### **Household Support Fund (HSF)**

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Councillor Sutton informed Members about how the £27.5m awarded to the County Council under the Household Support Fund over the last two and a half years had been distributed, together with the plans for this years' funding of £11m.

### **Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council**

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Councillor Charlotte Atkins and Councillor Yates welcomed the Council's nine new 'volunteering principles' together with practical guidance documents for staff, and expressed the hope that other local authorities would follow in the County Council's footsteps.

Councillor Trowbridge paid tribute to fellow Members for the voluntary work they undertook, for example as school governors and as Parish Councillors. She added that the electorate did not recognise the voluntary work that elected members did. Councillor Alan White also paid tribute to those unpaid volunteers who cared for family members.

Councillor Snape also paid tribute to those organisations who had been recognised under the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

Councillor Flunder indicated that there was still work to do in supporting new volunteering groups.

Councillor Cox spoke about the health and wellbeing benefits which could be derived from volunteering.

Councillor Wilson thanked Members for their comments and indicated that there were 4,600 volunteer hours working within the Council's Archives and Heritage Team; 9,944 volunteer hours working in the Council's Countryside Estate; and 500 regular volunteers across the Council's services.

### **Joint Coroners Service - Legal Framework and Financial Protocol** (Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Councillor Pardesi enquired as to how the new Framework/Protocol would help to reduce the backlog of cases. In response, Councillor Alan White indicated that he would look into this issue and that the Council would work closely with the Coroner's Office to see what could be done to expedite matters.

### **Community Learning Ofsted Inspection and Accountability Agreement 2023-2024** (Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Councillor Philip White extended his congratulations to the Community Learning Team on the outcome of the Inspection and the achievement of the "Good" rating.

### **Framework Agreement for Maintenance and Minor Works** (Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Charlotte Atkins concerning the scope for local procurement under the Framework Agreement, Councillor Alan White indicated that, where possible, services were procured from local providers.

### **Centre for Asylum Seekers in Stafford** (Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Councillor Wilson spoke about how she was proud to live in this Staffordshire and how the County welcomed those fleeing persecution.

Councillor Pardesi enquired as to what evidence there was to suggest that

the Centre would house young single adults. In response, Councillor Trowbridge stated that this had been highlighted by the King's Counsel during the three-day public inquiry.

Councillor Spencer referred to the difficulties in managing the sensitivities around emotive issues such as this and asked his fellow Members to exercise control when discussing the matter. Councillor Loughborough-Rudd added that it was important that Members remembered the responsibilities placed on them as elected members.

Councillor Trowbridge referred to the Council's past experiences in helping to settle refugees but indicated that she was opposed to the proposed Centre for asylum seekers in Stafford due to the unsuitability of the proposed location. Councillor Francis added that he supported Councillor Trowbridge's views.

Councillor Greatorex indicated that it was not for the Council to debate the Planning Inspector's decision but to consider how the Authority could best work with Serco, Stafford Borough Council and other partners to ensure local services could manage and that the asylum seekers received the support they needed during their time in the county.

Councillor Winnington spoke about the need to keep local residents informed.

Councillor Alan White referred to the need for the Council to reflect on the implications of the opening of the Centre on local residents including matters such as ensuring access to local services. He also added that he was working hard with the Home Office regarding the importance of all parts of the UK carrying their fair share in accommodating those seeking asylum.

### **Ironman 70.3 Staffordshire** (Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Councillor McMahon expressed his disappointment at the Ironman Group's decision to discontinue the event in Staffordshire and suggested that the County may wish to put on its own "homegrown" event. He also spoke about the public health legacy arising from such events. Councillor Parry also expressed his support for Councillor McMahon's suggestion.

Councillor Alan White spoke about the positive impact of the Ironman event on the local economy and expressed the hope that the County would attract similar events in the future.

### **Armed Forces Day and Windrush 75** (Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Councillor Clements referred to the events which had taken place in Tamworth in celebration of Armed Forces Day. She also expressed her thanks to the County Council and the District/Borough Councils for signing-up to the Armed Forces Covenant.

### **Fostering Communities**

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Councillor Flunder, Councillor Wilson and Councillor Edgeller paid tribute to the County's Foster Carers for the vital work they did. They also stated that they would encourage anyone who had an interest in becoming a foster carer to come forward.

Councillor Sutton spoke about the recent Foster Carer Awards which celebrated the contribution made by the County's Foster Carers who, collectively, had 651 years of experience. He also referred to the Council's "Mockingbird" programme whereby experienced Foster Carers provided advice and support to those new to fostering.

### **School Crossing Patrols**

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Members extended their congratulations and thanks to the school crossing patrol service which celebrated its 70th year this year. Councillor Parry spoke about the difficulty in recruiting school crossing patrols in some areas and also encouraged anybody interested in working for the service to come forward.

Councillor Tagg and Councillor Williams asked that their congratulations and thanks also be extended to all those in the School Crossing Patrol Service.

### **The Samaritans**

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

Councillor Edgeller, Councillor Yates, Councillor Philip White and Councillor Alan White paid tribute to the Samaritans who would be celebrating their 70th Anniversary in November this year. Councillor Edgeller suggested that, in order to show appreciation and recognition of their work in Staffordshire, she would encourage all Members to work with their local communities to plant a tree in all 60 of the County's Electoral Divisions.

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

## **18. Recommendations to the Council**

### **(i) Independent Remuneration Panel - Recruitment**

The Council's approval was sought to the appointment of the following candidates to serve on the Independent Remuneration Panel.

- Colin Agar
- Gemma Shepherd-Etchells

Councillor Worthington commented on the high quality of the applicants who had put themselves forward for consideration for membership of the Panel.

**Resolved** – That Colin Agar and Gemma Shepherd-Etchells be appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel for a four-year term.

### **(ii) Updates to the Scheme of Delegation in relation to Staffordshire County Council's responsibilities under Section 53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**

The Council's approval was sought to changes to the processes for handling Definitive Map Modification Order applications to help to address the backlog of applications.

In response to a comment from Councillor Winnington concerning the work of the Panel and the back-log of applications awaiting determination, Councillor Alan White explained that the County Solicitor was looking at the allocation of resources to enable the Panel to better fulfil its role.

**Resolved** – That the proposed changes to the Scheme of Delegation in relation to the Council's responsibilities under s53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as set out in paragraphs 4-9 of the report, be supported; and that the Constitution and Scheme of Delegation be updated accordingly.

## **19. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-2023**

Councillor Greatorex moved consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022 – 2023.

Councillor Heath, Councillor Clements, Councillor Spencer and Councillor Edgeller gave a brief overview of some of the work which had been undertaken by their respective Overview and Scrutiny committees during 2022 - 2023. The Members also extended their thanks to officers, including the Council's Scrutiny Team, for their support and also to Cabinet Members for engaging in the scrutiny process.

**Resolved** – That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022 - 2023



be received.

## **20. Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel - Annual Report 2022-23**

Councillor Sutton moved consideration of the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2022-23.

Councillor Silvester-Hall, Councillor Thompson and Councillor Kruskonjik commended the report and also the work of the Panel.

Councillor Sutton extended his thanks to Members for their comments and also to his fellow Panel Members and the officers who supported them, for their work and commitment. He also informed the Council that the Panel had seen a change in direction over the past twelve months with the young people now choosing and leading on the various workstreams.

**Resolved** – That the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2022-23 be received.

## **21. 2022 Community Fund - 2022/23 Report and Next Steps**

Councillor Wilson moved consideration of the report.

Councillor Edgeller, Councillor Cox and Councillor Northcott spoke about how the Fund was valued by local communities and also high-lighted how some of the funding had been utilised in their respective areas.

Councillor Philip Atkins outlined how the funding could be used to pump-prime projects and also extended his thanks to Peter Barker for his work in setting-up and administering the Fund.

Councillor Eagland expressed the hope that the Fund would continue for many years.

Councillor Wilson extended her thanks to Members for their comments and also referred to how the Fund had been utilised by communities to support local Platinum Jubilee celebrations in 2022 and also the King's Coronation celebrations this year. She added that, during 2022/23, the Fund had supported 180 different groups at a total cost of £932,000.

**Resolved** – That the report be received.

## **22. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel**

Councillor Pardesi enquired as to whether the piloting of Fire crews of three was still on-going. She also referred to a sentence on the third page

of the report which stated that “economic factors also had an impact on delivery” and enquired as to what these factors were. In response, Councillor Peters indicated that he would take these matters up with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Councillor Spencer indicated that he welcomed the report and, in particular, the increased emphasis on road safety.

**Resolved** – That the report be received.

## **23. Questions**

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

### **Question**

Up until Autumn 2022, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) managed, under contract, the County section of NCR55 Biddulph Valley Way. When SMDC returned the contract due to transferring their countryside officer and associated country parks to the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, routine maintenance reverted to County, there is no evidence that any routine maintenance has been undertaken since. What is the County’s position with conducting routine maintenance on this route, as I am aware of three interested and competent parties who would like to consider taking over this contract to manage this important national cycle route?

### **Reply**

The highways team have continued to inspect the sections of the Biddulph Valley Way that are the responsibility of the County Council throughout the period and where required have been arranging repairs.

Following the surrender of the lease by SMDC the county council’s highways team have been in contact with the Wildlife Trust and are awaiting information on what they are able to offer in future.

### **Supplementary Question**

Can I have the name of an officer who has the authority to award a contract to a body that is prepared to work with the community to maintain and improve this national cycle route, so we can get on and ensure that it gets the maintenance it deserves?

### **Reply**

The Council has continued to arrange the repairs where required and I will ensure that you can get hold of an officer's name who you can liaise with; but remembering that this is one of many routes the Council maintains.

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

### **Question**

Is the cabinet member aware of the widespread dissatisfaction of residents with the urban grass verge cuts being reduced from ten to six and often these schedules not being met, resulting in rat infestations and other unpleasant circumstances in several parts of the county? Will he revisit the 10-times approach in collaboration with the district and borough?

### **Reply**

To start with a correction, the change in the number of grass cuts was from 8 to 6 cuts per season, which was introduced in 2020 to help support the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

A wide range of different highway grass cutting delivery arrangements exist across the County, including the use of private local contractors, 4 Borough and District councils and 17 Parish and Town Councils. One of the big benefits of local councils delivering highway grass cutting is that they have the flexibility to choose to provide additional cuts at their own cost at any time throughout the year.

All of the county council's delivery arrangements are closely monitored to ensure that the county council's highway grass cutting specification and minimum number of cuts is delivered and there have been no occasions when scheduled cuts have not been provided.

However, following changes to some historic delivery arrangements there has been a relatively small number of cases where grass that was previously cut by one of the local Borough or District Councils was not cut at the start of this season because it wasn't clear if it was part of the highway verge, an area of privately owned land or public open space that continues to be managed by the respective local Borough or District Council. We believe that all of these areas have now all been identified and interim mowing arrangements are in place whilst ongoing responsibility is resolved.

With regards to future grass cutting frequency and delivery arrangements, I'm pleased to confirm that a business case is currently

being developed to allocate the resources needed to carry out a widescale review of highway verge management specifications. Starting later this year with digitisation and Quality Assurance of over 4.5 million sq.m of highway verge, the aim of this review is to enable more flexibility over local grass cutting specifications and delivery arrangements – meaning that they can be adapted to best meet the needs of local residents, maximise potential biodiversity, reduce CO2 emissions and improve their contribution to flood risk management.

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

### **Question**

What is the current level of pupil absence in Staffordshire schools? How does that compare with pre Covid pandemic levels of absence? Are there areas where attendance is particularly poor or good? What impact does socio economic factors and pupil age have on attendance?

### **Reply**

Overall attendance in Staffordshire compares favourably with the national and regional averages. Although there is no current validated data to make comparisons, the DfE is publishing unvalidated data that can be used to compare Staffordshire attendance data. The latest information available indicates that attendance in the primary phase is 94.9% compared with the national average of 94%. In secondary schools the attendance rate is 90.5% compared with 87.9% nationally and in Staffordshire special schools the latest attendance rate is 90% compared with the national rate of 85.9%.

The current overall absence rate is 7.2%. Whilst attendance has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, it has improved since last year which was 7.6% and we continue to support schools where there are concerns about pupil absence.

As you will see from the above information, absence rates are higher in secondary schools.

In the latest published data (2022) Staffordshire is ranked in the second quartile for attendance with an absence rate in line with the national average and below both the regional and statistical neighbour averages.

### **Supplementary Question**

Are there particular areas of the County where attendance is

particularly poor or good? My concern is that however many children are not in school, we don't want them to be "out of sight and out of mind". As a County Council, we should be concerned about their welfare. Do we have a means of that those children are self and well?

### **Reply**

This is a matter which we are examining through the Childrens Improvement Board in some detail. The concerns you have expressed are the concerns we feel as well. It is concerning that children are being "rolled-off" from schools under the guise of elective home education and I have myself, on a number of occasions, encountered 13/14 year old boys in particular in an afternoon who I have challenged as to why they are not in school and they have replied that they are being home educated. It is a really important point that you raise. We will be awaiting the returns from schools in the new term to clarify precisely what the situation looks like; and we will continue to press government ministers for a route through to ensuring that children who are at home are safe and well and are getting the appropriate level of education.

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

### **Question**

Ahead of the rollout of the Government's extension of 30 hours free childcare, how confident is the Council that it will meet the requirement when nine out of ten councils now fear that nursery closures this year will undermine capacity?

### **Reply**

In the Government's spring budget, the Chancellor announced transformative reforms to childcare for children and families. The new entitlements will be introduced in phases beginning in April 2024. From:

- April 2024, all working parents of 2-year-olds can access 15 hours funded childcare per week
- September 2024, all working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3-years-old can access 15 hours funded childcare per week
- September 2025, all working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3-years-old can access 30 hours funded childcare per week

This provides a significant challenge for local authorities due to the

short timeframe from the announcement to implementation. Staffordshire are working at pace to prepare and plan for the extended entitlements, ensuring as many families as possible in Staffordshire will benefit.

The Childcare Act 2006, Section 6 places a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure there are enough childcare places available for families. The Early Years Team already work relentlessly, carrying out a variety of market management activities to ensure this statutory duty is met.

### **Understanding the Childcare Market**

Our highly developed understanding of the childcare market is underpinned by the following activities:

- The Early Years Team consistently collates and analyse a range of data including places and vacancies data for each provider which is recorded by district and ward. This is used to inform future planning and priorities.
- Sufficiency monitoring provides a framework for action in each ward. For example, if a ward is identified as causing concern the team prepares actions plans to develop new provision or extend existing provision to meet demand.
- The team provides a range of consultancy support to the sector including advice regarding sustainability. This is available free of charge to all Staffordshire providers. This service is bespoke and supports settings to consider a variety of options/working models, therefore mitigating against potential closures.

This market management activity has been recognised as an example of effective practice by the Department for Education and Ofsted.

Staffordshire has seen some nursery closures, although a smaller number than originally expected following the pandemic. In a significant number of cases alternative childcare by another provider has been set up on the same sites. Where nurseries announce their intention to close, use of accurate data, the team's knowledge and excellent relationships with providers means the team respond quickly to scope out new opportunities to ensure families are able to access the places required.

### **Preparation for the Extended Offer**

In preparation for the implementation of the extended entitlements the Early Years Team have completed two pieces of work:

- A sufficiency audit to survey all Staffordshire providers who offer early education entitlements. The survey closed on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> July with a return rate of 99.5%.
- An analysis of datasets enabling estimation of the number of additional places required for two-year-olds in each district.

This information provides a firm foundation from which to develop detailed action plans to support future sufficiency planning.

The team has excellent relationships with its childcare providers; through its Early Years Reference Group and relationships, the team remains well informed about the challenges and needs of the early years sector and is supporting them to respond.

### **Supplementary Question**

Your answer states that we are working at pace to ensure that as many families as possible in Staffordshire will benefit. Do we take it then that there will be some families, irrespective as to whether they need it or want it, will be denied a free place?

### **Reply**

The provision of childcare is not the responsibility of local authorities; it is the responsibility of private providers. Our responsibility is to work with the many providers to ensure that we have sufficiency of supply; so, it is almost impossible for us to be able to say, going forward, whether we will or won't be able to meet the demand which comes forward. Up until now, we have been able to do that particularly well in this county and we have not seen anywhere near the level of closures of private providers that has been seen elsewhere across the country. That gives me good confidence that the team will be able to work well so that we are able to fulfil our statutory duty.

## **24. Petitions**

### **(i) Stop Parking Charges at Greenway Bank County Park**

Councillor Yates presented a petition opposing car parking charges at Greenway Bank Country Park.

### **(ii) Brocton Crossroads**

Councillor Francis presented a petition seeking improvements to the junction of Sawpit Lane/Teddesley Road with the A34 Stafford to Cannock Road (Brocton Crossroads).

**Chairman**



**County Council – 12 October 2023**

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**Consideration of the Petition: “Staffordshire County Council decision to take away valuable sports pitches and building”**

**1. Recommendations**

That, given the number of signatures has triggered the Council’s Petition Scheme, the Council acknowledges and debates the Petition: “Staffordshire County Council decision to take away valuable sports pitches and building”.

**2. Background**

The County Council has received the following petition: “Staffordshire County Council decision to take away valuable sports pitches and building” containing over 27,400 signatures. The petition relates to land at Cherry Close, Chasetown, Burntwood.

Under the Council’s Petition Scheme any petition that exceeds 5,000 valid signatures automatically triggers a debate at the next available Council meeting. To be a valid petition it must clearly state the issue and set out individual signatures and addresses. To ensure the debate is prompted by those that are directly affected by the service or pay Council Tax in Staffordshire then only those people who live, work or are in education within Staffordshire are counted as part of the total for the purposes of the scheme.

**3. Structure of the Debate**

The structure of the debate is set out in the Council’s Procedural Standing Orders. A lead petitioner will be entitled to speak at the start of the debate setting out the background to the petition and what those signing the petition ask of the Council in terms of action in response to the issue. The petitioner will have five minutes to present the petition.

After this, Council will have the opportunity to debate the issue. 15 minutes is set aside for the debate although this may be extended at the discretion of the Chairman. At the conclusion of the debate Council should agree what action it wishes to take in response to the petition.

**Background Documents:**

Petition: Staffordshire County Council decision to take away valuable sports pitches and building.



## Statement of the Leader of the Council

### 1. Staffordshire Means Back to Business - Oral Update

The Cabinet have received an 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:

- This month saw a decline of 90 claimants in Staffordshire which contrasted with an increase seen nationally. The total number of claimants in the county now stands at 14,955 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%.
- The youth claimant count in Staffordshire saw an increase of 65 claimants to a total of 2,885 young people. The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit now stands at 4.6%. This is lower than the national rate of 5.0% and far lower than the regional rate of 6.7%. The continued increase in the youth claimant count highlights the importance of continuing to engage with our younger residents and support them to find employment or continue in some form of education or training.
- Our Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Service has been focusing on results day recently for both GCSE's and A-Level students, promoting the support the team can offer with advice and signposting. Our Employment Brokers have been supporting people across the county, whether they have received their grades in order to follow their favoured path, or maybe need some advice on where to turn next and consider other avenues such as employment, apprenticeships or alternative training.
- I am also pleased to report that two members of the Jobs and Careers Service team recently had a visit with the Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression Mims Davis to discuss how they support candidates with challenges in accessing the employment market and our support for ex-service men and women. I'm pleased to say that the Minister was very impressed in our success to date and the companies we work in partnership with to support people into employment.
- In terms of job vacancies, there was a 15% increase in across Staffordshire compared to a 13% increase nationally between July and August. Demand for labour and skills remains high, with there

currently being 1.6 jobs available for every claimant within the county, and therefore our focus continues to be to support those who find themselves unemployed to secure one of those jobs.

- Unfortunately, we have recently heard the news of the Wilko insolvency, which is due to the continued impact of the shift in shopping habits across the country. We have convened a taskforce comprised of senior representatives of the County Council, Borough and District Councils, Department for Work & Pensions and the National Careers Service to exchange information and consider our support offer, including the deployment of our Jobs & Careers Services if and when appropriate. Positively, there are currently around 1,000 retail jobs being advertised within the county, and we will work with any former Wilko staff to help them secure one of these jobs or to move into a different area of work.
- The construction of the West Midlands Interchange development is expected to begin before the end of the year. A key aspect of the project will be supporting our residents to take advantage of employment opportunities through both the construction and operational phases, and we were successful in securing a significant amount of funding from the development for employment and skills programmes. Due to the scale of the development, we have a dedicated Employment Broker for the project who has now met with the first sub-contractor to begin recruitment for the first phase of the build.
- The upgrade of the A38 Branston Interchange is a key component of our successful £20m bid from round two of the Levelling Up Fund. This will provide Burtonians with safer and easier access to and from the A38. Legal agreements with the developer of the nearby Branston Locks development and National Highways are also close to being agreed and it is expected will be signed shortly. There is a three-month lead in before construction can start, and we're therefore expecting works on improving the junction to commence in early 2024. The Levelling Up Fund is also paying for the upgrade of several major roads in Cannock and Stafford and the purchase of a new fleet of low emission buses to improve our public transport network.
- The nominations for the Enjoy Staffordshire tourism awards closed last week, with judging taking place over the next few months and the awards ceremony set for March 2024. The awards give us the chance to celebrate our best tourism and hospitality business and the valuable contribution they make to the local economy.

*(Cabinet 20 September 2023)*

## **2. Living My Best Life' - A Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent People in Staffordshire 2023-2028**

The Cabinet have approved the final draft of a new 'Living my Best Life': Joint Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent people in Staffordshire 2023-2028 which has been jointly developed by the Staffordshire County Council and the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

The vision for the new strategy is: 'We want Staffordshire to become a place where people living with disabilities and neurodivergences can do what matters to them; where they are valued and treated as equals in all aspects of society; and where they can live a healthier and better quality of life for longer.'

The strategy focusses on supporting people to live their best lives, regardless of the nature of their disability or neurodivergence or whether they have care and support needs. It considers experiences and needs of individuals throughout their lives in education, work and as individuals in their homes and in local communities using transport, accessing social, leisure and cultural opportunities and accessing local shops and services and health and social care support.

An action plan is to be co-produced by the end of December 2023 and its delivery will be overseen by the new Disability Partnership Board and ultimately, the Health and Wellbeing Board.

*(Cabinet 19 July 2023)*

## **3. Supported Living Future Commissioning Arrangements Update**

Supported Living care services provide individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions the support they need to be as independent as they wish. The Council currently funds Supported Living care services for 559 residents, 474 in county and 85 out of county, at a gross annual cost of £34.1 million.

After talking with individuals who benefit from Supported Living care services, care providers and other stakeholders, the Council has developed a commissioning plan to ensure that we get the best possible quality of care, the outcomes that individuals want and value for money.

The Cabinet have approved the commissioning plan and have delegated authority to the Director of Health and Care to appoint successful care providers to the Flexible Framework for Supported Living care services and to award call-off contracts under the Flexible Framework for Supported Living care services. They have also authorised the Director of Health and Care to extend the current Dynamic Purchasing System for contracting

Supported Living care services up to 1 July 2025 to cover the period of transition to the new contracts.

*(Cabinet 19 July 2023)*

#### **4. Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards - Contract Award**

The Council has a statutory duty to manage Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications. This is a procedure prescribed in law when it is necessary to deprive a person of their liberty in a hospital or care home if they lack capacity to consent to their treatment and care. Staffordshire has a lot of care homes, which means we receive a high number of DoLS applications and, historically, we had a large waiting list of DoLS applications.

The Government was planning to replace DoLS with new legislation called Liberty Protection Safeguards. This would have reduced demand as well as time requirements. However, Liberty Protection Safeguards have been repeatedly delayed with no implementation date in the foreseeable future and a possibility that they will be abandoned altogether.

The Cabinet have therefore given their approval to the procurement of additional capacity to support the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards process with the aim of reducing the waiting list of DoLS applications below 550, equivalent to one month's work.

*(Cabinet 19 July 2023)*

#### **5. Staffordshire Bus Strategy**

The aim of the Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) across England is to improve bus public transport recognising that a strong, successful, low emission bus network will help support the decarbonization of the transport sector, support the economy and minimise traffic congestion. The Staffordshire BSIP was developed in partnership with the public bus providers operating in Staffordshire, to deliver outcomes which were shaped by a public engagement exercise and comments from the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The financial ask of the BSIP to the DfT was £106m which was to be delivered over 3 years and a further £7m to cover lifetime costs, however, the Staffordshire BSIP bid was unsuccessful. Cabinet have therefore agreed that of a full review of the previously agreed BSIP be undertaken taking into account the Department for Transport (DfT) feedback to enable Staffordshire County Council a greater chance of success for future bids.

The Cabinet have also given their approval to the completion of the process for the creation of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) that is to commence on the 1 August 2023. The EP is a formal agreement between the local

authority and bus operators setting out what is expected of each party, and the standards that will be met.

*(Cabinet 19 July 2023)*

## **6. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 1, 2023/24**

The Cabinet have received an update on Quarter 1 activities for each service area: Health and Care; Families and Communities; Economy, Infrastructure and Skills; and Corporate Services. They noted the key challenges facing the Authority including:

- Continued pressures across Children's services, including the rising cost, number and complexity of Children in Care, and ongoing placement pressures.
- SEND - Increased demand for Education, Health and Care Plans.
- Safeguarding and Deprivation of Liberty - Safeguarding requests remain high, with additional capacity being explored.

The latest revenue forecast outturn showed an overspend of £9.5m (1.39%), compared to the balanced budget.

*(Cabinet 19 July 2023)*

## **7. Treasury Management Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

The Cabinet have received details of the Council's investment and borrowing activity during 2021/22 including both borrowing and investment decisions taken throughout the year in the light of the interest rates and economic conditions prevailing at the time.

They noted that the treasury management activities were carried out prudently during the year and the policy of funding new borrowing from internal cash balances continued to generate significant savings.

As well as being prudent, the County Council's low-risk investment strategy, which focuses on lending to low-risk institutions and the need for liquidity and diversification, has ensured the County Council has been strategically placed to deal with market challenges arising from global events such as the war in Ukraine and global inflationary pressures.

*(Cabinet 19 July 2023)*

## **8. Accelerated Progress Plan: Enhanced Assess-Plan-Do-Review Pathway, Strategy for Special Provision and the Staffordshire Children and Young People's Framework**

The Cabinet have approved two major strategies designed to deliver outcomes related to the SEND Accelerated Progress Plan (Ofsted/CQC). The proposed Strategy for Special Provision sets out plans to significantly enhance the support mainstream schools can access to support their work to meet the needs of children with SEND. The model proposes an enhanced pre-statutory support pathway (before Educational, Health and Care Plan), designed to target, and focus intervention for children with SEND. This pathway builds on existing best practice and the well-established District Model. To deliver this enhanced and targeted support, the strategy proposes to develop 8 district Staffordshire Enhanced District Inclusion Teams. It is proposed that teams will comprise of school providers working with Local Authority and Health Services. Within the Strategy for Special Provision, additional work has already commenced to enhance and increase capacity in existing special schools in line with a detailed countywide gap analysis.

It is recognised some children and young people may require pre-statutory support which is beyond the scope of what the Staffordshire Enhanced District Inclusion Teams can offer, therefore the creation of a Staffordshire Children and Young People's Framework is proposed. The Framework would operate as a means of securing the provision required for children and young people to continue accessing the curriculum whilst supporting a greater equality of access, a consistent approach to monitoring outcomes and a more transparent procurement process.

*(Cabinet 20 September 2023)*

## **9. Staffordshire Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**

"Adaptation" is understanding the risk and vulnerabilities associated with the changing climate and considering ways to prevent or minimise the damage it causes. As our climate changes we need to act to put measures in place to allow for quality of life to be maintained and protect the economy and environment now and in the future. Local Authorities have an important role in raising awareness and empowering local communities and businesses by sharing information on how impacts can be managed and what we can all do to help. The Cabinet have approved the Staffordshire Adaptation Strategy which will provide a suitable framework to allow individual councils to develop their own Adaptation delivery plans, encouraging consistency and partnership working across the councils and other partners in a collaborative nature. The Adaptation Plan will align with other relevant plans such as the Staffordshire County Council Local Flood Risk Management Strategy approved in March this year.

*(Cabinet 20 September 2023)*

## **10. The Recommission of the Shared Lives**



The Shared Lives service offers long term placements as well as short breaks, day opportunities and home from hospital placements for individuals aged 16 and above. This includes older people, people with mental health needs including dementia, people with a physical or sensory impairment, learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and people with complex needs. Most of the individuals currently accessing the service have a learning disability and associated needs. The Council currently has a Shared Lives service contract with PSS UK LTD, which is due expire on 31 March 2024. The service currently supports 78 people at a forecast cost of £1.3 million in 2023/24. The Cabinet have approved proposals to recommission the service to provide continuity of care for individuals and ensure an ongoing good quality service that offers value for money. The Cabinet have also approved the extension of the current Shared Lives service contract for up to 12 months, in the event of an unsuccessful procurement, to enable the Council to consider alternative options.

*(Cabinet 20 September 2023)*

## **11. Staffordshire Warmer Homes – Approval of the Spend plans for the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2**

The Government Green Homes Grant is aimed at tackling fuel poverty, meeting the 2050 Carbon Net Zero targets and re-energising local economies in the wake of the Covid pandemic. The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 is the fourth phase of the Green Homes Grant. It provides people living in homes with low energy performance ratings (Energy Performance Certificates D to G) with free installation of measures to improve thermal efficiency. The measures include loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, external wall insulation and air source heat pumps, as well as solar photovoltaic panels with battery storage, solar thermal panels, and underfloor insulation, adapting homes to the impact of climate change again contributing towards lowering Staffordshire's carbon dioxide emissions. Staffordshire County Council has been awarded £10.5m from the Government Green Homes Grant Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 and the Cabinet have approved proposals for the expenditure of the Grant in line with the conditions of the Grant. These proposals will support another 530 households that are currently in fuel poverty to have warmer homes and will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by around 13,000 tonnes over the life of the installed measures.

*(Cabinet 20 September 2023)*

## **12. Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Service**

Launched by the county council early in 2023, the Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Service is supporting people to find work and apprenticeships, learn new skills, and change careers. Our team of expert brokers connect jobseekers with the right employers and training opportunities across the

county, and can react quickly to situations such as the relocation of Amazon or collapse of Wilko.

Throughout the Autumn, the service is hosting jobs and careers fairs across the county, including one in Cannock today (12<sup>th</sup> October) and in Rugeley and Newcastle at the end of the month. Find out more on its [website](#), including advice on careers or training options, top tips to gain employment and information for businesses.

This excellent partnership with the Jobcentre Plus, National Careers Service, district and borough councils and the county's colleges, is providing joined up and comprehensive support not only to people looking for employment or training, but also employers searching for ideal candidates for their vacancies.

### **13. Fixing more roads**

Throughout the summer our highways crews continued to repair, resurface and improve roads and footpaths across Staffordshire. The work included the £1.4m resurfacing and improvements to the A34 Stone Road in Stafford.

We know good roads are important for residents and businesses and that is why we are investing an additional £30m in our highways over the next two years to keep them well-maintained, safe and on the move. We are also concentrating on major gateways into our towns, to make sure we keep the busiest roads in good condition.

### **14. Celebrating 10 years of diverting waste from landfill**

It is a decade since the county council and Veolia opened the Energy Recovery Facility at Four Ashes in South Staffordshire. In that time an incredible 2.75million tonnes of household waste have been diverted from landfill, and the waste has instead been used to help generate enough electricity to power 66,000 homes.

Reducing the amount of waste that goes into landfill makes Staffordshire more sustainable, and is a major part of our commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

### **15. Call to get your Covid and flu jabs this autumn**

As temperatures start to drop, I urge all eligible people across the county to get their Covid and flu jabs, to protect themselves and their loved ones over the autumn and winter when viruses circulate more easily.

The emergence of a new variant is a stark reminder that Covid-19 is still circulating, and we must remain vigilant. It is vital that our most vulnerable residents receive a booster vaccine to strengthen their immunity and reduce the risk of becoming seriously ill.

Please take up the Covid booster and flu jab this autumn as soon as you are invited by the NHS. It is the best way to protect yourself and those around you.

## **16. Give a child a childhood**

Every year, tens of thousands of children across the UK need someone to provide foster care and in Staffordshire alone, 60 more foster families need to be found this year. Now with children back at school, and older teenagers off to university or college, those families with a spare room are being urged to consider fostering

'Give a child a childhood', is the latest campaign to attract the next generation of foster families. Fostering is an incredible way of putting your time and energy into helping a young person, and making an enormous difference in their life. Most people can foster, but you do need to have a spare bedroom. You do not have to foster full-time either, as we also need foster carers for short breaks.

Anyone interested in finding out more about fostering with Staffordshire County Council can visit the [Foster for Staffordshire website](#) or call 0800 169 2061.



**Countryside and Rights of Way Panel - Friday 11 August 2023****Audit and Standards Committee - Tuesday 19 September 2023****Proposed addition to the Scheme of delegation in relation to the Handling of S53 Applications under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**

The following recommendations were agreed at the last meeting of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel and are now referred to this Committee for approval.

**Recommendation**

I recommend:

- a. That the Panel support the proposed measures set out in paragraph 10 of this report.
- b. That the proposed addition to the Scheme of Delegation be referred to the Audit and Standards Committee and Full Council, with the recommendation that it be approved, and that the Constitution and Scheme of Delegation be updated accordingly.

**Local Member Interest:**

N/A

**Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services****Report****Summary**

1. Under the County Council's Constitution this Panel is authorised to carry out the duties of the County Council in respect of S53 of the Wildlife and Countryside act, 1981. In addition, the Constitution enables this Panel to delegate its functions to another Authority.
2. The Panel is being asked to approve an addition to the Scheme of delegation in relation to S53 applications.

## Background

3. Staffordshire County Council is the authority responsible for maintaining the Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way as laid out in section 53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 ("the 1981 Act"). Determination of applications made under the Act to modify the Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way, falls within the terms of reference of the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel of the County Council's Regulatory Committee ("the Panel").
4. At present the Council deals with and works on applications, as far as is practicable, in the order in which applications were originally received. This is considered to be the fairest and most equitable mechanism with regard to all parties in the current circumstances.
5. This mechanism has been affected in recent years by the number of applications which the Council has been directed to determine by the Secretary of State. Consequently, directed applications are dealt with in the order of the date determined by the Secretary of State or as close to that schedule as feasible.
6. At the 23 June 2023 meeting of this Panel members approved a new Priority Criteria for prioritising the *Determination* stage of S53 applications and I was granted delegated powers to exercise the Council's discretion to apply that new Criteria.
7. This delegation together with the additional resources allocated to this function means that whilst we are processing initial applications for determination more speedily, it is creating a backlog of Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMO) to be made. That backlog currently stands at 83. I am concerned that in some circumstances the backlog is not in the overall interest of the Council itself, in particular:
  - a) where an application has been the subject of Court proceedings requiring the Council to obtain such a level of legal expertise and advice, that any potential delay in making an order might result, over time, in the loss of that knowledge.  
or
  - b) Where pending cases are linked to routes which may be affected by major projects such as HS2.

8. To address these specific issues, I'm requesting a further delegated authority to prioritise the making of Orders in either of the above two instances.

### **Proposed updates to Scheme of Delegation.**

9. To remind members I am currently authorised:
  - a. *To determine applications for Modification Orders under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 unless, after consultation with the local County Councillor(s) for the area concerned and the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, they decide that the matter in question ought to be determined by the Countryside and Rights of Way Panel.*
  - b. *To determine whether an applicant's details should be removed from the Register of Applications made under Paragraph 2(3) of the Public Rights of Way (Register of Applications under Section 53(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981)(England) Regulations 2005.*
  - c. *To exercise the County Council's discretion as set out in section 3 of the Priority Scheme.*
  - d. *To delegate the County Council's surveying authority powers in respect of any cross-boundary application to the appropriate neighbouring authority as and when such action would prove beneficial both in terms of the effective use of resources and processing of the s53 application.*
10. Members are asked to approve the inclusion of the new Delegation:
  - e. *To prioritise the making of Definitive Map Modification Orders in circumstances where:*
    - a. *an application has been the subject of court proceedings which has required the Council to obtain such a level of legal expertise and advice, that any potential delay in making an order might result, over time, in the loss of that knowledge, or*
    - b. *routes may be affected by major projects, such as HS2.*
11. At its meeting on 11 August 2023 the Countryside and Rights of way Panel supported the above request and referred the matter on to the Audit and Standards Committee and Full Council for approval.

## **Resource and Financial Implications**

12 The proposal aims to make best use of the councils' resources.

## **Risk and Legal Implications**

13 The delegation of decision-making powers need to be properly justified and authorised to avoid challenge to any proposed action on a DMMO application.

## **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

### **Contact Details**

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## County Council - Thursday 12 October 2023

### Reports from the Audit and Standards Committee:

- a. Potential Appointment of Independent Members to the Audit and Standards Committee
- b. Review of the Audit and Standards Committee Terms of Reference

### Recommendations

- a. That section 11, Paragraph 25.1 of the Constitution be updated to show the membership of the Audit and Standards Committee to include one non-voting, co-opted independent member;
- b. That the 'Governance and decision making' section of the attached revised Terms of Reference include under the remit for a five-member Panel;

*'to carry out the recruitment process and make recommendations to Council on the appointment of a non-voting, co-opted Independent member of the Audit and Standards Committee.'*

- c. That the proposed revised terms of reference, updated to provide for point (ii) above be approved.

### Report of the Audit and Standards Committee

#### Report

1. At its meeting on 19 September 2023, the Audit and Standards Committee approved the two attached reports relating to:
  - a. The Proposed Appointment of a Non-Voting, co-opted Independent Member to the Audit and Standards Committee
  - b. Proposed revised Terms of Reference for the Committee,
2. Both reports aimed to comply with recently published Guidance by CIPFA on the Effectiveness of Audit and Standards Committees and are now referred to Full Council for approval and authority to make the necessary changes to the Constitution.
3. If Council is minded to approve the reports, the following recommendations apply:

- a. That section 11, Paragraph 25.1 of the Constitution be updated to show the membership of the Audit and Standards Committee to include one non-voting, co-opted independent member;
- b. That the 'Governance and decision making' section of the attached revised Terms of Reference include under the remit for a five-member Panel;  
*'to carry out the recruitment process and make recommendations to Council on the appointment of a non-voting, co-opted Independent member of the Audit and Standards Committee.'*
- c. That the proposed revised terms of reference, updated to provide for point (ii) above be approved.

### **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Audit and Standards Committee Report – Potential Appointment of Independent Members to the Audit and Standards Committee

Appendix 2 – Audit and Standards Committee Report – Review of Audit and Standards Committee Terms of Reference

### **Contact Details**

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<b>Local Members Interest</b>
N/A

## **Audit and Standards Committee - Tuesday 19 September 2023**

### **Potential Appointment of Independent Members to the Audit and Standards Committee**

#### **Recommendation(s)**

I recommend that:

- a. To consider the option of appointing co-opted Independent Members to serve on the Audit & Standards Committee in line with guidance produced by CIPFA within its 2022 'Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police'.
- b. If Members wish to explore this option further, to request the preparation of the associated recruitment documentation, for their review and approval.

#### **Report of the Director of Finance**

### **Report**

#### **Background**

1. In October 2022 CIPFA published its updated 'Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police'. This set out its guidance on the function and operation of audit committees in local authorities and police bodies and represented CIPFA's view of best practice for audit committees in local authorities throughout the UK and for police audit committees in England and Wales. This publication incorporated CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police (2022) ("the position Statement") which set out CIPFA's view of the role and functions of an audit committee and replaced the previous 2018 Position Statement.
2. The revised and updated 2022 edition expanded on its 2018 guidance which considered the inclusion of an independent member on the Audit Committee. The membership and effectiveness of the Audit Committee section has been updated in the 2022 guidance, to consider the appointment of additional co-opted independent members which is an important step in ensuring that the Audit Committee can undertake its work effectively. CIPFA also states that the appointment of co-opted

independent members on the committee should consider the overall knowledge and expertise of the existing members. The objective of including such members is to increase the knowledge and expertise base of the committee, reinforcing its independence.

3. In order to confirm what the role of the co-opted independent member of the committee should be CIPFA has provided the following guidance. 'The role description for a co-opted independent member should be the same as for an elected representative who is a committee member. The only substantial difference will be that a co-opted member cannot vote on council policy, so will not be able to take part in the decision, though they can contribute to the discussion prior to the formal decision.'
4. Research has been carried out to ascertain the extent of Independent Members being appointed to Audit Committees within Local Government, based on information shared via the Society of County Treasurers. From the 28 responses collected, 57% had already appointed at least 1 independent member. A further 21.5% were actively looking into recruiting a member/ had been out to source an individual but had been unsuccessful and considering next steps. The final 21.5% did not report any activity regarding independent members.
5. Previous work was undertaken in 2020 to establish the skills/attributes required of an Independent Member contained in person specifications, the following generic criteria were customary present in the recruitment information reviewed and are still considered to be relevant in light of the 2022 revised guidance i.e.:
  - a). Experience
    - Membership or involvement in any organisational environment where decisions are taken in meetings
    - A good understanding of finance and of the concepts of internal control, corporate governance, risk management and performance management
  - b). Qualifications
    - Over 18 years of age
    - Lives or works within the area of the Council
  - c). Disqualifications
    - A person may not be an Independent Member of the Audit Committee for the following reasons
    - Employment by or Membership of X Council in the last 5 years or current employment by or membership of any local authority
    - Any bankrupt or person who has made a composition or arrangement with creditors which is extant

- Having, within 5 years of the appointment, a conviction for an offence resulting in a sentence of imprisonment (whether or not suspended) or a period of not less than 3 months without the option of a fine.
- A disqualification for being elected or being a member of an authority under the Representation of the Peoples Act 1983 (corrupt electoral practices) or under the Audit Commission Act 1998 (unlawful local authority expenditure)
- Being a relative or close friend of a member or officer of X Council

d). Skills, Knowledge, Abilities and Personal Qualities

- A person who is an active and respected member of the community
- A person with knowledge of Local Government
- A person willing to serve the public interest and the local community
- A person who can demonstrate honesty and integrity which has never been impugned
- A person with the ability to look at issues objectively and make decisions on their merit
- A person who can put aside all political affiliations when making decisions
- A person who understands the concept of accountability
- A person willing to give reasons for decisions or actions taken in a spirit of openness whilst respecting issues of confidentiality
- A person who can take account of the views of others, work with others but is able to reach their own conclusions on issues before them
- A person who can show respect for others including a commitment to equal opportunities and the impartiality and integrity required of Council Officers
- A person who can demonstrate an understanding of the duty to uphold the law and trust placed on them

e). Other Requirements

- An ability and commitment to attend X formal meetings a year, plus ad-hoc sessions and training events

6. With regard to payment for undertaking the role, typically it was an unpaid role or one which attracted a small sum. Potential benefits have been identified as 'bringing an alternative and helpful perspective to the work of the Audit Committee'.

7. CIPFA's 2022 guidance also highlighted some potential pitfalls to the use of independent members that should also be borne in mind.

- Over-reliance on the independent members by other committee members in local authorities can lead to a lack of engagement across the full committee.
- A lack of organisational knowledge or context among the independent members when considering risk registers or audit reports.
- Both independent members and officers must try to establish an effective working relationship and appropriate protocols for briefings and access to information.

These factors should be considered when developing the committee structure and plans put in place to provide an appropriate level of support to the audit committee member.

8. Following the Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit & Standards Committee workshop event in May 2023, it was considered that Members re consider the option of recruiting/co-opting a suitably qualified independent individual onto the Committee. This report has set out the benefits and potential pitfalls of the process to support Members in determining the way forward on this matter.

### **Equalities Implications**

There are no direct implications arising from this report

### **Legal Implications**

Whilst there are no direct implications arising from this report, the Accounts and Audit Regulations specifically require that a relevant body must “maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control in accordance with the proper internal audit practices”

### **Resource and Value for Money Implications**

The net budget of the Internal Audit Section is £1,027,510.

### **Risk Implications**

Whilst there are no direct risk implications arising from this report, the Audit & Standards Committee objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of the control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources. Where relevant, the results of individual reviews will link into the County Councils Annual Governance Statement, providing assurance on the operation of key controls.

## **Climate Change Implications**

There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

## **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

- CIPFA – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022 Edition.
- Potential Appointment of Independent Members to Audit Committees – January 2020
- Review of the Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit & Standards Committee Report – September 2023
- Review of the Audit & Standards Committee Terms of Reference Report – September 2023

## **Contact Details**

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## **Audit and Standards Committee – Tuesday 19 September 2023**

### **Review of Audit & Standards Committee Terms of Reference**

#### **Recommendation(s)**

I recommend that:

- a. To consider the proposed revisions to the terms of reference for the Audit & Standards Committee following publication of CIPFA's latest guidance - Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022 Edition.
- b. To refer the finally agreed Terms of Reference to full Council for approval and inclusion in the County Council's Constitution.

#### **Local Member Interest:**

N/A

#### **Report of the Director of Finance**

#### **Report**

##### **Background**

1. CIPFA's Publication - Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022 Edition sets out its guidance on the function and operation of Audit Committees in local authorities and police bodies and represents CIPFA's view of best practice for audit committees in local authorities throughout the UK and for police audit committees in England and Wales. Suggested terms of reference for Audit Committees are also included within the guidance.
2. Details of the key changes contained in the 2022 guidance were presented to the Audit & Standards Committee at the March 2023 meeting. One area that was identified as an action point related to reviewing the current terms of reference against the exemplar ones contained in the guidance. Overall, the current terms of reference were comprehensive. Several additional areas contained in the 2022 suggested terms of reference covering the following areas are recommended for inclusion: -



- a) To consider whether the annual evaluation for the AGS fairly concludes that governance arrangements are fit for purpose, supporting achievement of the Authority's objectives.
  - b) To consider reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including compliance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code
  - c) To make appropriate enquiries of both management and the head of internal audit to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resources limitations.
  - d) To provide free and unfettered access to the Audit and Standards committee chair for the External Auditors, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the committee.
  - e) Specifically in relation to the Statement of Accounts, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the council.
3. As part of the review, it was identified that a number of areas within the suggested terms of reference had not been previously included in the current version but have been undertaken for several years by the Committee as best practice. These are as follows:
- a) The Committee has oversight of both internal and external audit, together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.
  - b) Receiving an annual risk based internal audit plan from the Head of Internal Audit, including internal audit's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.
  - c) To approve significant interim changes to the risk based internal audit plan and resource requirements.
  - d) Monitoring the response to major findings and the implementation of key recommendations including issues of concern and action in hand as a result of internal audit work.
  - e) The statement of the level of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and Local Government Application Note (LGAN). Areas of non-compliance will be outlined; any significant aspects will be incorporated into the annual governance statement where applicable.
  - f) To report to full council on a regular basis on the committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the committee in meeting its performance

4. The current terms of reference also included those functions which came under the remit of the former Standards Committee. The opportunity was also taken as part of the review exercise to consider those functions and to revise the terms of reference for the 'Standards' functions being undertaken by the Committee.
5. The proposed revised terms of reference for the Audit and Standards Committee are attached as **Appendix A** to the report. All proposed key changes are highlighted within the revised document. For ease of reference, yellow depicts new additions, and green for those new suggested functions that are already undertaken by the Committee but had not been included in the current terms of reference.

#### **Equalities Implications**

6. There are no direct implications arising from this report.

#### **Legal Implications**

7. Whilst there are no direct implications arising from this report, the Accounts and Audit Regulations specifically require that a relevant body must "maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal control in accordance with the proper internal audit practices"

#### **Resource and Value for Money Implications**

8. The net budget of the Internal Audit Section is £1,027,510.

#### **Risk Implications**

9. Whilst there are no direct risk implications arising from this report, the Audit & Standards Committee objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of the control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources. Where relevant, the results of individual reviews will link into the County Councils Annual Governance Statement, providing assurance on the operation of key controls.

#### **Climate Change Implications**

10. There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

**List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

- CIPFA – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2022 Edition.
- Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit & Standards Committee – 21 March 2023. Presentation.

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## Appendix A

### Proposed Revised Terms of Reference for the Audit & Standards Committee

#### 3. Audit and Standards Committee

3.1 The purpose of our audit and standards committee is to provide independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment. It provides independent review of Staffordshire County Council's governance, risk management and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting and annual governance processes. The Committee has oversight of both internal and external audit, together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability. It also oversees the Council's democratic processes and the content and application of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and Co-opted members.

**Commented [AL(1)]:** Function already undertaken by the Committee but not included in the current Terms of Reference

3.2 The Audit and Standards Committee has the following functions and responsibilities: -

#### Audit Matters

#### **Governance, Risk and Control**

- To approve, monitor, review and amend from time to time the Council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework including the ethical framework to ensure that it is adequate and effective including approval of the local code of corporate governance.
- To review the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) prior to approval and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, taking into account internal audit's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control.
- To consider whether the annual evaluation for the AGS fairly concludes that governance arrangements are fit for purpose, supporting achievement of the Authority's objectives.
- To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's risk management processes and to: -
  - Approve the Risk Management Policy Statement and monitor its implementation
  - Approve the content of the Corporate Risk Register and proposed Risk Mitigation Action Plan and monitor its implementation

**Commented [AL(2)]:** New addition to the Terms of Reference

- To consider the Authority's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Authority.
- To consider reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including compliance with CIPFA's Financial Management Code
- To consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.
- To monitor the Counter Fraud Strategy, actions and resources and review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the Authority from fraud and corruption.
- To consider the Authority's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.
- To consider the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships and/or collaborations, where required to do so in delivering the Internal Audit Plan.

**Commented [AL(3)]:** New addition to the Terms of Reference

#### **Internal Audit**

- To work with and advise the Director of Finance in ensuring arrangements for the provision of an adequate and effective Internal Audit.
- To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the Internal Audit service and Chief Officers' responsibilities for ensuring an adequate control environment including: -
  - approving the Internal Audit Charter
  - Receiving an annual risk based internal audit plan from the Head of Internal Audit, including internal audit's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.
  - Monitoring progress against the plan through the receipt of periodic progress performance reports.
  - To approve significant interim changes to the risk based internal audit plan and resource requirements.
  - Receiving and considering major Internal Audit findings and recommendations.
  - Monitoring the response to major findings and the implementation of key recommendations including issues of concern and action in hand as a result of internal audit work.
  - Considering the Head of Internal Audit's annual Internal Audit report including: -

**Commented [AL(4)]:** Function already undertaken by the Committee but not included in the current Terms of Reference

**Commented [AL(5)]:** Function already undertaken by the Committee but not included in the current Terms of Reference

**Commented [AL(6)]:** Function already undertaken by the Committee but not included in the current Terms of Reference

- The statement of the level of conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and Local Government Application Note (LGAN). Areas of non-compliance will be outlined; any significant aspects will be incorporated into the annual governance statement where applicable. The results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) that support the statement contained in the annual report- these will indicate the reliability of the conclusions of internal audit.
  - The effectiveness of Internal Audit to support the AGS.
  - The opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion – these will assist the committee in reviewing the AGS.
- To contribute to the QAIP and in particular, the periodic external quality assessment of Internal Audit.
  - To consider any impairments to independence or objectivity arising from additional roles or responsibilities outside of internal auditing of the Head of Internal Audit. To approve and periodically review safeguards to limit such impairments.
  - To make appropriate enquiries of both management and the head of internal audit to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resources limitations.
  - To review any issue referred to it by the chief executive or a director, or any council body.
  - To provide free and unfettered access to the Audit and Standards Committee Chair for the Head of Internal Audit, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the Committee.

#### **External Audit**

- To determine the procurement process to be taken by Staffordshire County Council for the appointment of external Auditors either via means of an auditor panel or through Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) and to express an opinion on their selection and rotation.
- To monitor the independence, adequacy and effectiveness of the External Audit service and respond to its findings. This will include :-
  - o Discussing the nature and scope of the audit of Staffordshire County Council services and functions, and considering the external audit fee and terms of engagement;

**Commented [AL(7):** Function already undertaken by the Committee but not included in the current Terms of Reference

**Commented [AL(8):** New addition to the Terms of Reference

- o Receiving and considering the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance and advising the Council as appropriate;
- o Commenting on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
- o Monitoring the County Council's response to the external auditor's findings and the implementation of external audit recommendations.
- To support the independence of external audit through consideration of the external auditor's annual assessment of its independence and review of any issues raised by PSAA or the auditor panel, as appropriate.
- To provide free and unfettered access to the Audit and Standards committee chair for the External Auditors, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the committee.

**Commented [AL(9)]:** New addition to the Terms of Reference

#### **Financial Reporting**

- To approve authority's statement of accounts. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the council.
- To consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

**Commented [AL(10)]:** New addition to the Terms of Reference

#### **Accountability Arrangements**

- To report to those charged with governance on the committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements, and internal and external audit functions, where required.
- To report to full council on a regular basis on the committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the committee in meeting its performance.

**Commented [AL(11)]:** Function already undertaken by the Committee but not included in the current Terms of Reference

## Standards Matters

### **Standards**

- To make recommendations to full Council on the Code of Conduct (including associated Protocols) for Councillors and Co-opted members and to monitor its application and effectiveness including overseeing training for Councillors and Co-opted members.
- To oversee the Register of Members' Interests.
- To oversee the effectiveness of the Councils procedures for investigating and responding to complaints about Councillors and Co-opted members (as approved by Full Council in May 2021)
- To appoint a Panel of five members of the Committee to:
  - interview and make recommendations to Council on the appointment of Independent Persons in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and an Independent Person to serve on the Audit and Standards Committee should CIPFA's Practical Guidance For Local Authorities (2018 Edition) on Committee membership be adopted.
  - consider alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct as referred for consideration by the Monitoring Officer following consultation with an Independent Person.
- To consider and, where applicable, make recommendations to full Council on decisions of the Standards Panel on breaches of the Code of Conduct considered by that Panel.
- To oversee the maintenance of the List of Politically Restricted Posts

Commented [AL(12)]: New addition to the Terms of Reference

Commented [AL(13)]: New addition to the Terms of Reference

### **Elections**

- To oversee the actions of the Returning officer with regard to the delivery and conduct of the County Council elections and casual vacancies, and any peripheral responsibilities.

### **Governance and Decision-Making**

- To oversee, review, and make any recommendations on, the effectiveness and operation of the Constitution and any of the provisions of it.
- To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the County Council's Information Governance arrangements
- To establish Panels of five members of the Committee, as and when required, with delegated powers to deal with:
  - appeals by officers against disciplinary, grading or employment related action (including in respect of the List of Politically Restricted Posts)



- appeals against dismissal from teachers employed in Education Support Units
- appeals against any Executive decision where the law requires that a person shall have a right of appeal within the Council against that decision and for which no other provision is made under this Constitution
- Planning Applications referred to in paragraph 2.2 of section 8 of this Constitution (ie where the Planning Committee is minded to refuse an application for planning permission submitted on behalf of the Cabinet in respect of a County Council service (membership of this Panel shall not include members of the Cabinet, relevant Scrutiny Committee or Planning Committee))

**Miscellaneous**

- For functions which are not a function of the Executive – to authorise, or revoke the authority of, a person to exercise a function to which Section 70 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 applies
- To deal with any other matter (regulatory, judicial, quasi-judicial or licensing) which by law cannot be the responsibility of the Executive for which no other provision exists in this Constitution.

**Health and Safety**

- To monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the County Council's Corporate Health and Safety policies and to approve the annual Action Plan and key priorities



## **County Council – Thursday 12 October 2023**

### **Staffordshire Electoral Review – Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission’s Proposals for Staffordshire**

#### **Recommendations of the Leader of the Council**

I recommend that County Council:

- a. Note the progress made to date on the County’s Electoral Review.
- b. Support the response to the LGBCE for Staffordshire’s boundary changes.
- c. That the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services be authorised to finalise the proposals prior to submitting to the Boundary Commission.

#### **Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services**

##### **Background**

1. In March 2022, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) initiated an Electoral Review of Staffordshire. The rationale for undertaking an Electoral Review is both due to our changing population which has led to electoral inequality, and the length of time since our last review.
2. The last Electoral Review was undertaken between 2010-12 and resulted in Staffordshire maintaining the existing council size of 62 Members, with division boundaries being altered to address voter inequality and reflecting the identities and interests of local communities.
3. There are several key stages to an Electoral Review:
  - a. Stage 1 – which considers the Council Size i.e. number of Councillors
  - b. Stage 2.1 – which considers division arrangements
  - c. Stage 2.2 – the consultation of draft proposals made by the LGBCE
4. In March 2023, Council approved and submitted its response to the first LGBCE consultation.
5. The Commission has published proposals for changes to Staffordshire. The LGBCE have largely accepted what SCC approved at Council in March and submitted during the last consultation. The key proposals from the commission include:

- a. LGBCE have agreed to 62 Councillors (as is)
  - b. All of the proposed divisions will be represented by one councillor
  - c. Reduction of -1 member in Tamworth
  - d. Increase of +1 member in East Staffordshire
  - e. Major boundary changes to Stafford
  - f. Moderate changes to Cannock
  - g. Minor changes to East Staffs, Newcastle and Staffordshire Moorlands
6. A public consultation on the proposals will run from 8 August 2023 to 16 October 2023. Once the LGBCE have considered all responses to the consultation, they aim to publish final recommendations in January 2024. They will then lay a draft order in both houses of Parliament. Subject to parliamentary scrutiny, the new electoral arrangements are scheduled to come into effect at SCC elections in 2025.
7. Proposals have been taken through Staffordshire County Council's Governance process for final approval at Full Council on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023, ahead of submission to the LGBCE by the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee have provided scrutiny and oversight of the process.
8. Broadly speaking, the Council is satisfied with the proposals set out by the LGBCE. The attached response sets out where the Council would like to comment on the proposals.
9. This is a consultation led and conducted by the LGBCE. The County Council and other interested parties, including members of the public are invited to submit their response to the Commission's proposals.

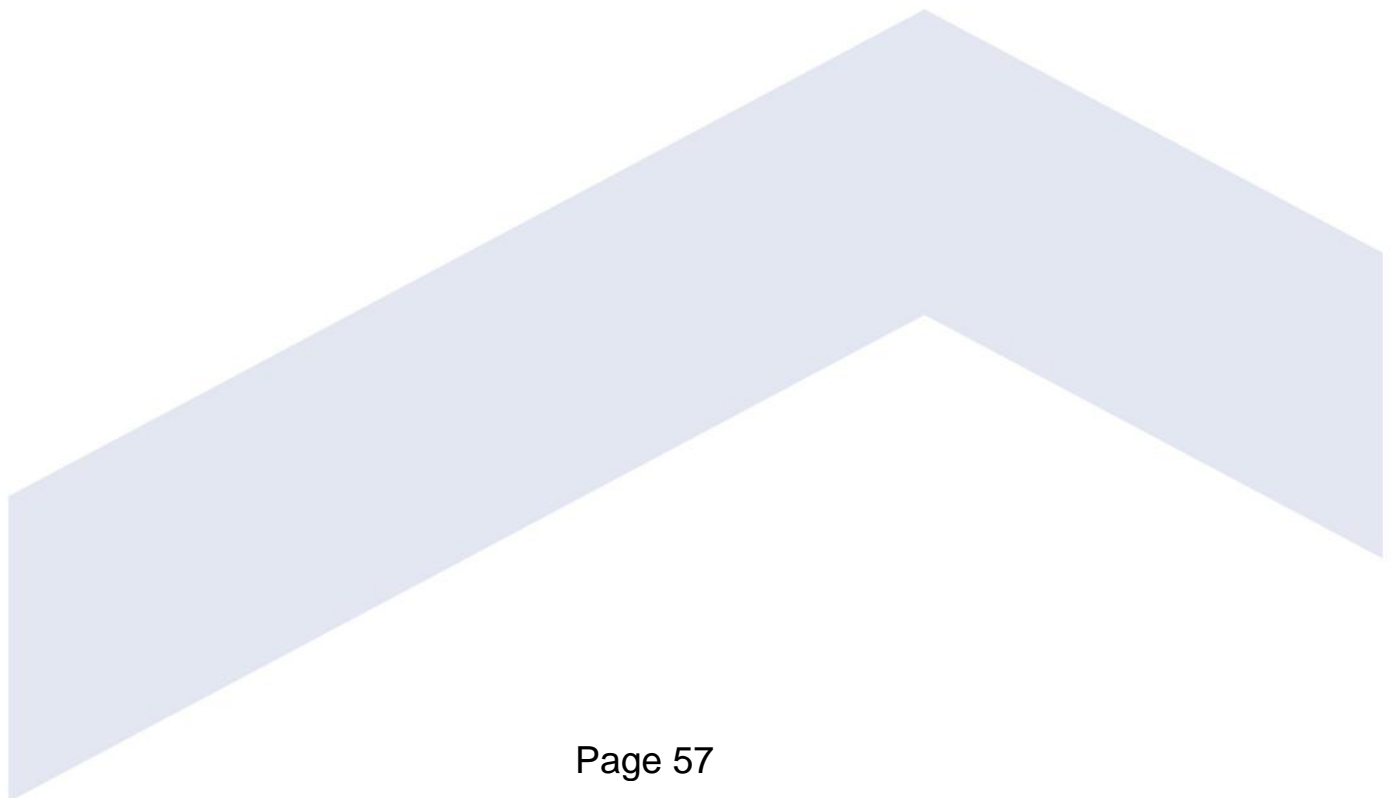
## **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – SCC Response to LGBCE Proposals.

Please note that the attached still requires minor edits prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023 deadline.

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**Staffordshire County Council  
Submission on Warding  
Patterns – Response to LGBC  
Draft Proposals**

**October 2023**

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## **Background**

To create Staffordshire's officers' response to the LGBCE proposals, officers have again collaborated with our elected members, listening to feedback and seeking additional community insight.

The remainder of this paper provides Staffordshire County Council's (SCC) response to the LGBCE Draft Proposals across the eight districts and boroughs of Staffordshire, outlining where we agree with the proposals, and including counterproposals where we do not.

## **Cannock District**

We support the recommendations made by the LGBCE, noting that the two submissions had many shared boundaries. Some of the differences are open spaces, which SCC considered during the consultation phase, that do not affect electorate numbers and provide improved coterminosity with the new ward boundaries.

The LGBCE proposal for Cannock Chase is broadly in accordance with what SCC submitted in March 2023 whereby we provided rationale and evidence as to community identity, electoral equality and effective and convenient local government.

## **East Staffordshire Borough**

We note that the LGBCE proposal for East Staffordshire is in accordance with the SCC proposal with the exception of the boundary between Burton Town and Burton Trent.

We support the recommendations of the LGBCE, on the basis that the proposed boundaries for Burton Town and Burton Trent provide improved coterminosity with the new ward boundaries, and use the railway line as a strong, natural boundary.

Furthermore, the LGBCE proposals for East Staffordshire are broadly in accordance with what SCC submitted in March 2023 whereby we provided rationale and evidence as to community identity, electoral equality and effective and convenient local government.

## **Burton Town**

The LGBCE proposal places Shobnall in the Burton Town division, rather than the Burton Trent division as proposed by SCC. During the consultation phase SCC had considered the option proposed by the LGBCE but rejected it due to the resulting electoral inequality. If, however, the LGBCE is minded to accept a variance of 13% then SCC supports their proposal on the following grounds:

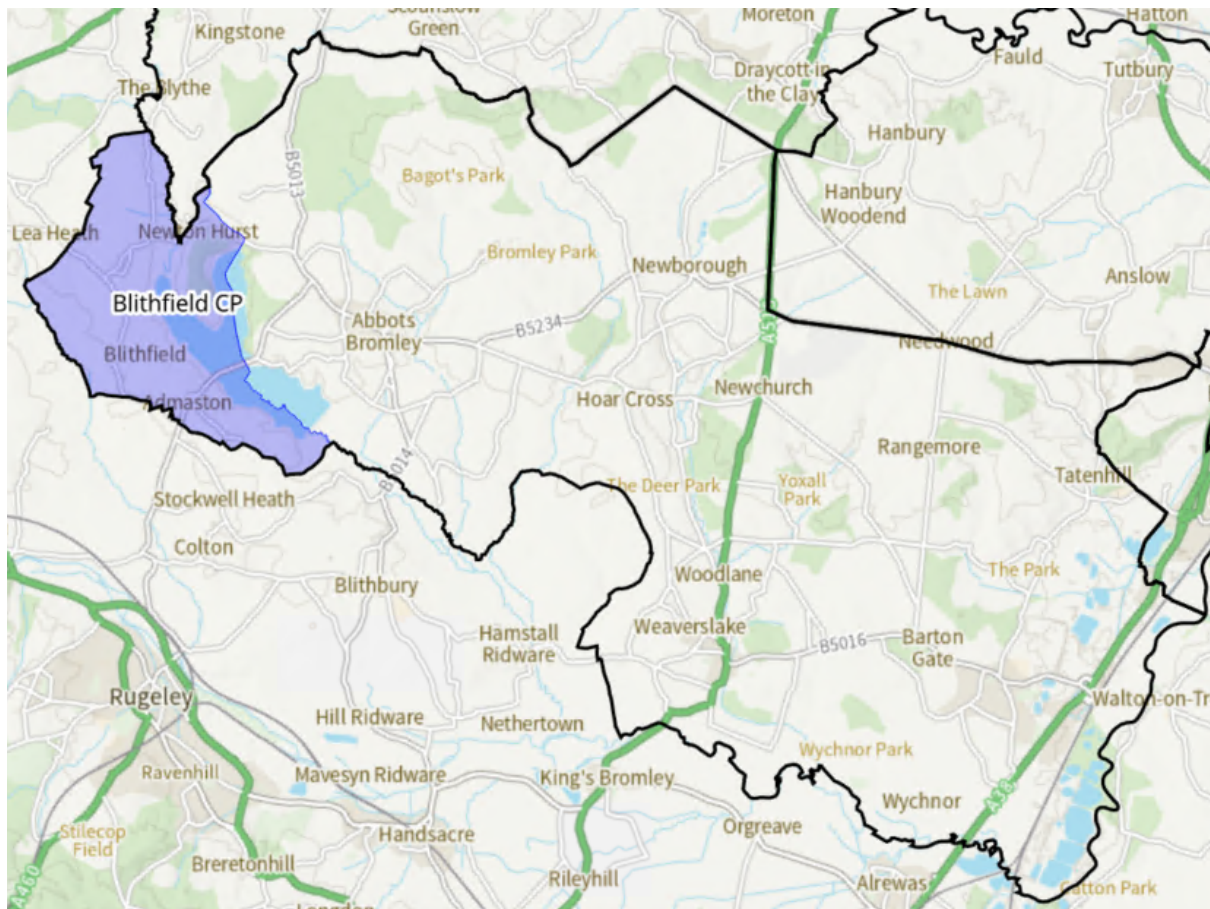
- 1) The railway line forms a strong, natural boundary between the two divisions.
- 2) Coterminosity is improved, as Burton Town division would be coterminous with the new wards of Burton & Eton and Shobnall.

## **Burton Trent**

The LGBCE proposal places Shobnall in the Burton Town division, rather than the Burton Trent division as proposed by SCC. During the consultation phase SCC had considered the option proposed by the LGBCE but rejected it due to the resulting electoral inequality. If, however, the LGBCE is minded to accept a variance of -9% then SCC supports their proposal on the following grounds:

- 1) The railway line forms a strong, natural boundary between the two divisions.
- 2) Coterminosity is improved, as Burton Trent division would be coterminous with the new wards of Anglesey and Stapenhill.

## Needwood Forest



We support the recommendations made by the LGBCE, with the consideration of keeping Blithfield Parish Council within the division of Needwood Forest.

The proposed inclusion of Blithfield CP in the Needwood Forest division leaves it isolated from the other main communities in the division - Abbots Bromley and Barton-under-Needwood. Although it would result in slightly worse electoral equality for Needwood Forest, consideration could be given to including Blithfield CP in Uttoxeter Rural division. This would improve the electoral variance in Uttoxeter Rural and include Blithfield CP in a division with a similar rural character and issues.

## **Lichfield District**

We note that there were changes to Lichfield City Council in May 2023, whilst the LGBCE was considering its recommendations.

We note that the LGBCE proposal for Lichfield completely aligns with the SCC proposal, and we are therefore in agreement with the proposal.

The proposal submitted by SCC in March 2023 provided rationale and evidence as to community identity, electoral equality and effective and convenient local government.

## **Newcastle under Lyme District**

We support the recommendations made by the LGBCE which are broadly in accordance with what SCC submitted in March 2023, with minor changes across four divisions in the north of the district, whereby we provided rationale and evidence as to community identity, electoral equality and effective and convenient local government.

## **South Staffordshire District**

We support the recommendations made by the LGBCE which completely align with the proposal SCC submitted in March 2023 whereby we provided rationale and evidence as to community identity, electoral equality and effective and convenient local government.

## **Stafford District**

We note that the LGBCE proposal for Stafford is based on the submission by the Stone Labour Party, noting that the submission had little in common with the SCC proposal.

We do not support the recommendations by the LGBCE. The proposal does not appear to consider the differences between urban and rural wards. Making the rural parts of Stafford too large makes representation significantly more difficult.

We therefore urge the LGBCE to reconsider the submission of SCC from March 2023 or alternatives that would improve effective and convenient local government.

## **Eccleshall & Gnosall**

As above, we do not believe that the proposal for Eccleshall satisfies the criteria of effective and convenient local government.

## **Stafford West & Rural**

We disagree with the recommendations for this division for the reasons set out above.

## **Stafford South East**

We do not support the recommendations for this division for the following reasons.

Walton on the Hill – We suggest Walton-on Hill to be part of Stafford South East Division. The community value arises from Walton High School

consisting of a majority of the pupils that reside in the Stafford South East Division. The school sits on the border of Stafford South East Division and Trent Valley.

Lodgefield Park and the Saltings - This area is part of the Baswich Ward within the Borough. The people living there are mainly elderly citizens that have no connections with Trent Valley. All community activities take place within Stafford South East Division. The river and canal separate the two divisions.

Meadowcroft Park and Penkside - Separating Stafford Town Division and Stafford South West from Stafford South East is the railway line and we believe this should be the marker for the separation of the three divisions. The 365 houses which are now being built (due for completion 2024) the other side of the railway line from Meadow Croft Park would compensate for the move from Stafford Town to Stafford South East for Meadowcroft Park.

Penkside should be left as part of Stafford South East being the same side of the railway line as Meadowcroft Park.

All the children attending Silkmore Primary Academy live in the Penkside side of the railway line and the children attending the Children Centre. The Community Centre along with St Peter's Church is in the heart of Penkside community.

### **Stafford South West**

We do not support the recommendations for this division for the following reasons.

Boundaries that were under SCC proposal (for Stafford West) had clear boundary lines - the M6, the railway line to 2 sides and the main road (Newport Road) to the north. This was changed slightly to add the Newport Road both sides giving the golf course as the boundary.

The Wolverhampton Road (major road into Stafford) which was completely within Stafford West is now proposed to be split between 3 divisions.

The identity of Rowley is very different to that of a rural area and parts are of a private estate nature again split by this new proposal.

We therefore urge the LGBCE to reconsider the submission of SCC from March 2023 or alternatives that would improve effective and convenient local government, community identity and electoral equality.

### **Wedgwood**

We would suggest a name change of Stone Rural North as opposed to Wedgwood.

The name Wedgwood derives from Josiah Wedgwood whose roots are in Etruria (Stoke on Trent) and not within the electoral commission boundaries for Staffordshire. Also, the Wedgwood factory itself remains in Stoke on Trent. Furthermore, the name Wedgwood is an ongoing commercial entity.



## **Staffordshire Moorlands District**

We support the recommendations made by the LGBCE for the divisions of Caverswall, Cheadle & Checkley, Churnet Valley, Leek Rural and Leek South which are broadly in accordance with what SCC submitted in March 2023, whereby we provided rationale and evidence as to community identity, electoral equality and effective and convenient local government.

We do however wish to draw attention to our disagreement with the specific proposals laid out for Biddulph North and Biddulph South and Endon.

### **Biddulph North and Biddulph South & Endon**

We do not support the recommendations for Biddulph North and Biddulph South & Endon. The proposal provides an electoral variance of -11% in Biddulph North and +7% in Biddulph South & Endon. We therefore urge the LGBCE to reconsider the submission of SCC from March 2023 or alternatives that would improve the electoral inequality between these divisions.

## **Tamworth District**

### **Overview of LGBCE Proposal**

We note that the LGBCE proposal for Tamworth completely aligns with the SCC proposal, and we are therefore in agreement with the proposal.

The proposal submitted by SCC in March 2023 provided rationale and evidence as to community identity, electoral equality and effective and convenient local government.

We note the concerns of the LGBCE that the wards boundaries used to build the division boundaries have been in place for some time and may no longer be entirely representative of the communities in the area. However, we have found no evidence to suggest this is the case and we therefore support in full the draft recommendations for Tamworth District.

## Rationale

**Criteria 1:** We worked with the Boroughs/Districts and Parishes to get the data producing and electoral forecast, we have used the strategy that is suggested by the LGCBE to ensure there is a balance over the three criteria. The sum used for the electoral equality was to take the Cllr size, calculate the projected electorate to create an actual allocation on the council size per district. Our calculation resulted in 62 – thus remaining at our current Council size, and the removal of one Cllr in Tamworth, and placing an additional Cllr in East Staffs.

**Criteria 2:** We have worked closely with the Strategic Delivery Managers (SDM's) who work closely with our District, Parish and Borough Councils and provide support to our County Councillors for their divisions. Strategic Delivery Managers hold a vast amount of local knowledge and insight for their patches across Staffordshire. Alongside working with the SDM's we held workshops with the Councillors which enabled us to help them to understand the criteria we need to work with for this review. We collaborated with them to understand their divisions, their communities and geography which naturally helped us to collate that much needed local insight and community identity.

**Criteria 3:** Due to collaborating with the Councillors and our local councils we have been able to remain as coterminous as possible and provide a healthy balance across all three of the criteria.

