

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 26 July 2018

Present:

Attendance		
Ben Adams	Jill Hood	David Smith
Philip Atkins, OBE	Syed Hussain	Paul Snape
Ann Beech	Keith James	Bob Spencer
David Brookes	Julia Jessel	Mike Sutherland
Gill Burnett	Trevor Johnson	Mark Sutton
Ron Clarke	Bryan Jones	Stephen Sweeney
Tina Clements	Dave Jones	Simon Tagg
Mike Davies	Jason Jones	Martyn Tittley
Derek Davis, OBE	Ian Lawson	Carolyn Trowbridge
Alan Dudson	Alastair Little	Ross Ward
Janet Eagland	Johnny McMahon	Alan White
Ann Edgeller	Paul Northcott	Conor Wileman
Helen Fisher	Jeremy Oates	Bernard Williams
Keith Flunder	Ian Parry	David Williams
John Francis	Kath Perry	Victoria Wilson
Colin Greatorex	Jeremy Pert	Mark Winnington
Michael Greatorex	Bernard Peters	Susan Woodward
Gill Heath	Jonathan Price	Mike Worthington
Phil Hewitt	Kyle Robinson	

Apologies for absence: Charlotte Atkins, Maureen Compton, John Cooper, Mark Deaville, Natasha Pullen and Philip White.

PART ONE

17. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

18. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 24 May 2018

Mr Francis indicated that paragraph 6 of the minutes, Statement of the Leader of the Council, failed to include reference to his request to the Leader to set up a meeting between local members and senior engineers from HS2 and asked that the minutes be amended accordingly.

RESOLVED – That, subject to the amendment detailed above, the minutes of the meeting of the Annual County Council held on 24 May 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

19. Chairman's Correspondence

The Queen's Birthday Honours 2018

The Chairman reported that a total of 11 Staffordshire residents had been awarded Honours in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2018 including a County Council employee, Michael Francis Burke, a peripatetic caseworker, who received a British Empire Medal for services to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Council extended their congratulations to Mr Burke and the other recipients on their awards.

Municipal Journal Local Government Achievement Awards 2018

The Council were informed that Matt Biggs from the Council's School Organisation Team had recently been awarded the prestigious Rising Star Award at the Municipal Journal Local Government Achievement Awards 2018. Matt was nominated for this award because of his exceptional ability and dedication to raising the profile of Early Years Education on a national level and being at the forefront of policy development and innovation.

Matt's award was the only award won by an individual, as all others on the night were won by Local Authority teams.

Governance of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services – Transfer to the Staffordshire Police and Crime Commissioner

The Chairman informed the Council that the formal Order for the transfer of governance of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to the Police and Crime Commissioner has now received Parliamentary approval. The Order (The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire (Fire and Rescue Authority) Order 2018) would come into effect on 1 August 2018.

Under the Order, The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority would be abolished on 31 July 2018 and the Commissioner would be given the legal identity of Fire and Rescue Authority from 1 August 2018.

20. 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.

Final Outturn Report for 2017/18

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mrs Woodward relating to the financial challenges facing shire councils and whether any lessons could be learned from the issues within Northamptonshire, Mr Atkins indicated that the solutions the County Council had to its financial challenges were different to Northamptonshire's. He added that the lessons

learned from the Northamptonshire case was that there needed to be a deliverable plan to tackle and overcome the challenges.

Mr D. Davis referred to the proposed capital programme of £142m and enquired as to whether this included developer contributions under Section 106. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that the £142m was funding to be provided by the County Council and did not include developer contributions. Mr Davis thanked Mr Atkins for his response and requested if he could also have the information in writing.

Adoption of Revised Civil Contingency Policy for Staffordshire County Council

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Mr Dudson enquired as to whether any monies had been set aside to address any civil contingencies which may arise. Mr Robinson also asked whether the Leader agreed that it was important for District, Parish and Town Councils to be adequately supported and furnished with the necessary resources as more responsibility was devolved down to them. In response to the questions, Mr A. White indicated that there was a multiplicity of organisations involved in civil contingency and it was therefore difficult to quantify how much was being set aside across the board. He also added that the Chief Executive, as one of the lead members in the civil contingencies unit, worked hard with other organisations to ensure that they knew their role should there be a disaster.

Highways and Transport Capital Programme 2018/19

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Mr Smith requested the Leader of the Council to use his best endeavours to ensure that local members were included in discussions with district councils relating to the provision of infrastructure. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that the County Council worked closely with district and borough councils on the strategic infrastructure plan and that no one organisation would be able to deliver all of the required infrastructure in isolation. He added that on schemes such as the Branston Locks development, the County Council had worked closely with the developer and the Local Enterprise Partnership.

Mr Robinson also referred to the structural maintenance programme and asked that Members have more of a say in the delivery of such schemes. In response, Mrs Fisher indicated that she would take the Member's comments on-board and would speak to him about the issue.

Mr Clarke enquired about the funding for the Staffordshire Freight Forum. In response, Mrs Fisher indicated that she did not have the information to hand and would therefore respond in writing.

Mr Brookes referred to the need to have a replacement programme to modernise street furniture across the County so as to improve road safety. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that there was no programme as such, but when refurbishment took place, consideration was given to the installation of the most appropriate type of street furniture and that this was also the case on new builds.

Mr Flunder referred to the progress being made under the programme of highway surface dressing. In response, Mrs Fisher indicated that surface dressing was a key factor in extending the lifespan of the County's roads and helped to stop pot holes appearing in the first case.

In response to a question from Mrs Woodward, Mr Atkins indicated that the works to Burton Bridge were progressing well and it was hoped that they would be completed ahead of schedule.

Whole Life Disability Strategy 2018-2023 (Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mrs Woodward concerning the strategy and the arrangements for consultation with stakeholders, Mr A. White indicated that great efforts were being made to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible would be consulted. He also mentioned the vital role which could be played by local members in explaining to their constituents why the changes were taking place.

HS2 Construction (Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Mr C. Greatorex referred to the disruption which local communities in Staffordshire would have to contend with during the construction phase of HS2 and the limited powers available to the County Council as the local highway authority. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that he had circulated a comprehensive briefing note to Members detailing the County Council's position in this matter. He added that, with regard to Phase 1A of the scheme, he encouraged Members to attend the local meetings being arranged by HS2 and also indicated that construction works on this Phase were due to commence in June 2019.

Mr Francis extended his thanks to Mr Winnington for the briefing note and indicated that local members should receive copies of any traffic impact assessments undertaken by HS2.

Mr Adams referred to how power would be provided to the new railway line, including the construction of new electricity pylons, and the impact this would have on the environment. He also spoke about the need to re-engage with HS2 to try to minimise the impact the construction of power distribution to the railway line would have on local communities.

Mr McMahon stated that it was clear that the various bodies with responsibility for public transport did not talk to each other and it was therefore incumbent on the County Council to ensure that such discussions did take place on matters affecting Staffordshire.

In response to Members' comments, Mrs Fisher indicated that she intended to write to HS2 to ensure that the County Council receives timely information from them and that she also intended to arrange regular meetings to update local members.

Mr Atkins indicated his concern of the impact HS2 would have on the workload of local members and also the adverse impact the construction works could have on tourism in the County.

Wider Financial Position

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward referred to the financial challenges facing the County Council, the need to make savings, and the potential detrimental impact this could have on the provision of services to the public and also on staff morale. She also added that the potential impact would have been reduced if decisions had been made at an earlier stage. In response, Mr Parry indicated that the Council had pursued the strategy of transforming services rather than “taking an axe to them”. Mr Atkins added that there was a wider national issue on the future funding of social care and that the Council would use its influence with Central Government to find a solution to this matter.

Mr Tagg referred to how Council’s had saved money through reducing running costs and cited the example of Castle House in Newcastle-under-Lyme where a number of public bodies, including the County Council and Borough Council together with Aspire Housing, shared the same building.

Economy

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Mr Brookes referred to a article in a local newspaper in Uttoxeter which referred to a 14% rise in the number of unemployment benefit claimants in the town. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that he did not know where those figures came from but unemployment in the County now stood at 1.3%.

Mr Smith commended the progress being made by the County Council in promoting economic growth in the County. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that for every £1 invested by the Council, £13.60 had been generated.

Mr Hussain expressed concern at the continued use of zero hours contracts by employers and requested the Leader of the Council to use the Council’s best endeavours to persuade employers to not use such contracts. In response, Mr Adams indicated that the County Council had created the right conditions for job growth and had increased employment across the County. Mr Atkins added that work was ongoing to improve people’s skills in order to attract better, high paid jobs into the County.

Mr Robinson indicated that he would like to see more economic growth/job creation in the north of Staffordshire. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that economic growth/job creation was facilitated by having a good local plan. Mr Atkins added that there was already a lot of economic growth in North Staffordshire including IC5 and IC6 at Keele, and Newcastle-under-Lyme becoming a University town.

Mr D. Williams extended his thanks to the County Council for the proposed extension of the i54 site in South Staffordshire and requested the Leader of the Council to push for the necessary infrastructure to support the development of the West Midlands

Interchange. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that the scheme still required planning approval.

World Cup

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Mr Robinson referred to the positive impact England's performance in the World Cup had had on bringing communities together and asked whether the Leader of the Council supported the possibility of the UK hosting the 2020 World Cup. In response, Mr Atkins referred to the excellent football stadiums in Staffordshire and the income which could be generated through hosting the World Cup.

Mr Clarke also spoke about the excellent facilities available at St Georges Park.

Staying Safe This Summer

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Several Members praised the work of the Fire and Rescue Service and other organisations including the Peak Park Rangers in responding to the surge in grass fires across the County during the current heatwave. Members also spoke about the hidden dangers of swimming in open water.

Mrs Edgeller expressed her support for the Police and Crime Commissioner's initiative to run the SRACE scheme again this summer.

Members also referred to the role of residents in ensuring the wellbeing of their vulnerable, frail and elderly neighbours during the current heatwave.

21. Recommendations to the Council

Independent Remuneration Panel - Appointment of New Members

Members were informed that the County Council was required to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel of between three and five members to provide advice and recommendations to the Council on its Members' Allowances Scheme. The Panel met each year to consider the recommendations to be made to the Council in respect of the level and nature of the forthcoming year's allowances.

The County Council at its meeting 24 May 2018 extended the period of office for Leslie Trigg as a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel for a further period of 12 months to 31 March 2019. The Independent Remuneration Panel currently had three members, the other two Members being Tom Roach and Christina Robotham whose term of office would expire in 2021.

At the County Council meeting held on 12 October 2017, it was agreed "That the Audit and Standards Committee be requested to carry out a further recruitment exercise for IRP members in 2018" so as to increase the Panel's Membership from three to five. This process had recently been completed and the Special Panel of the Audit and Standards Committee had recommend to the Council that Mrs Annie Barrett and Mr Christopher

Burden be appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel for a period of four years ending 31 March 2022.

RESOLVED – That the Council approve the recommendation of the Special Panel of the Audit and Standards Committee to appoint Mrs Annie Barrett and Mr Christopher Burden to the Independent Remuneration Panel for a period of four years ending 31 March 2022.

22. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police and Crime Panel

In response to a question from Mrs Woodward concerning the membership of the new Police, Fire and Crime Panel for Staffordshire, Mr D. Williams indicated that there was no intention to change the Membership or size of the existing Panel.

Mr D. Davis expressed his disappointment that the Police and Crime Commissioner was to take over the governance of the Fire and Rescue Service and had subsumed the responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Authority. In response, Mr D. Williams explained that the Police and Fire and Rescue services would not be combining, would have separate budgets, and that the Police and Crime Commissioner was only taking on the responsibility for their joint governance.

Mrs Clements expressed her concern over the latest statistics which showed that only 9% of reported crimes resulted in a prosecution and enquired as to what action was being taken by the Police and Crime Commissioner to improve this situation. In response, Mr D. Williams explained that the nature of crime had changed dramatically over the years, especially in relation to cyber crime and cross border crime. He added that the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable had introduced a new hub based approach, the aim of which was to enable police officers to respond to reported crimes more quickly which, in turn, would facilitate the gathering of evidence.

Mr Winnington indicated his concern at the lack of visible policing in rural areas. In response, Mr Williams indicated that there had been a reduction in the number of Police Officers in Staffordshire and it was hoped that the anticipated savings arising from the joint governance of the Police and Fire and Rescue services would enable more Police Officers to be employed, some of whom would be allocated to front-line services. He also indicated that PCSO's who were on duty at the time their respective Parish Council met were instructed to attend that meeting to provide the Parish Council with either a verbal or written report.

Mr Clarke referred to the need for a policy across public bodies on dealing with issues of trespass by travellers. Mr D. Williams responded by indicating that the Police had no powers to remove travellers from land unless a crime had been committed. Mr Tagg enquired about the "fast track system" in operation in Stoke-on-Trent and, in response, Mr D. Williams indicated that he would find out and would forward the information on to the Member.

Mrs Woodward enquired about the reference in the report to the financial management arrangements adopted by the Force and also to the PCCs review of the Safer Neighbourhood Panels. In response, Mr D. Williams indicated that the Police and Crime Panel had robustly scrutinised the financial management of the Force and the Office of

the Police and Crime Commissioner and was supported in this by an officer from the County Council. He added that, with regard to the Safer Neighbourhood Panels, attendance at Panel meetings had been poor and it was therefore correct for the PCC to question whether they provided value for money. Mr Peters also added that there had been difficulties in recruiting lay members to the Panels. Mr D. Williams responded by indicating that it may be possible to persuade Parish Councils to nominate members for the lay positions. Mrs Trowbridge added that the Panel she served on in Stafford was very well attended and that she hoped that it would be retained. Mrs Edgeller also referred to the important roles which could be played by neighbourhood watch schemes.

Mr Dudson expressed the view that the PCC's office did not provide value for money and was a waste of taxpayers' money. In response, Mr D. Williams indicated that there had been no challenges to the PCC on this matter.

Mr Sutton reminded Members that the role of the Police and Crime Panel was to scrutinise the Police and Crime Commissioner, not the Police Force.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

23. Report of the Chairman of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Mr Sweeney expressed his thanks to all Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority, past and present, for all their hard work during the time they served as Members of the Authority. Mr D. Davis added that he was proud of what the Fire and Rescue Authority had achieved since it was established, including the provision of new Community Fire Stations across the County and dramatically reducing the number of fire related deaths each year.

Mr Snape and Mr Sutherland praised the work of the Fire and Rescue service in supporting the Prince's Trust initiatives and the positive effect this had had on the lives of young people. Mr Clarke also asked that his thanks, and those of the Council, be extended to the Members of the Fire and Rescue Authority for their commitment and hard work.

Mr Winnington indicated that the County Council would retain its scrutiny role of the Fire and Rescue Service through the Police, Fire and Crime Panel.

Mr Sweeney extended his thanks to Members for their kind words.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

24. Questions

Mrs Woodward asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Will the Leader join me, politicians across political Parties and many Staffordshire residents in condemning the behaviour of the Member of Parliament for Burton?

Reply

Those of us who have read the reports in the Sunday paper will be disgusted by the stories about the Member of Parliament for Burton & Uttoxeter. He has suspended himself from the Whip while an independent investigation is conducted by QCs and his Association are meeting to discuss his position. I encourage all of us in public life at whatever level to adhere to the Seven Principles of Public Life established by Lord Nolan and the Committee on Standards in Public Life:

1. Selflessness – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
2. Integrity – Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
3. Objectivity – Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
4. Accountability – Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
5. Openness – Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
6. Honesty – Holders of public office should be truthful.
7. Leadership – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour.

This Code is publicly available on the Conservative Party website and I would hope all Political Parties adhere to these seven principles.

Supplementary Question

Does the Leader share the ambition that the County Council will be a lead authority in taking gender issues and sexism forward and be seen as a gender neutral and female friendly Council?

Reply

Yes I do.

Mr Robinson asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

A letter dated 22nd June 2018 from the Minister for Local Government, Rishi Sunak MP to Staffordshire MPs clearly states that over the next three years there is to be an increase in spending power of almost £19 million for Staffordshire County Council. Does the Leader agree with the Governments' response to MPs and will the Leader of the council now commit funding to help support the Kidsgrove community in their bid to re-open Kidsgrove Leisure Centre?

Reply

The government includes all funding streams and makes assumptions about an authority's council tax levels and business rates income when it calculates the 'core spending power' of an authority.

The government calculated Staffordshire's core spending power as increasing by £18.9 million from 2017/18 to 2019/20, however this increase is reliant upon increases in council tax and business rates income whilst funding from government reduces. The amounts included in the core spending power calculation are also included in the budget gap of £35.4 million in 2019/20.

The provision of leisure services is the remit of district and borough councils and in Kidsgrove, the Community Interest Organisation is working with Newcastle Borough Council, the county council and other partners to see whether the re-provision of some leisure facilities is feasible. Any commitments around the site will not be made until the full business case and costings are finalised.

Supplementary Question

Is the County Council going to put some funding towards reopening Kidsgrove Sports Centre or commit funding to a new one in the 5 to 10 year plan as has been stated by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council?

Reply

I refer you to my written response and would add that we own the site, that has a value on it, but the provision of leisure services is the responsibility of district/borough Councils, and we hope that the Community Interest Company succeeds where others have failed.

Mr Robinson asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

A recent National Audit Office report has highlighted that due to the poor implementation and associated negative impact of the £1.9bn Universal Credit programme, additional costs have been created for other local services such as food banks, advisory and advocacy services. Has Staffordshire County Council attempted to collect any local data from such services to establish the impact of Universal Credit being rolled out on our Staffordshire residents?

Reply

The roll out of Universal Credit in Staffordshire has so far been limited to Lichfield District and Tamworth Borough, with the rest of the county seeing the implementation of Universal Credit later on this year. In view of this, it is too early for us to fully understand the implications of the introduction of Universal Credit and the wider impact that it may have upon local services provided by other public and third sector organisations across Staffordshire or upon Staffordshire's residents.

However, Universal Credit is adapting the welfare system to changing patterns of work and, through the latest technology, intended to create an agile service offering support. The Department of Work and Pensions should therefore listen carefully to claimants, campaigners and frontline workers when they report problems and complaints.

In a county with low unemployment levels it will be of importance for us all to better understand what impact Universal Credit may be having upon residents and services as Universal Credit is rolled out across the county.

Supplementary Question

Does the Leader agree with me that this Authority should be looking more closely at how these benefit changes are impacting on services and how the County Council could do more to support advocacy, advisory and voluntary services which support so many people in our County?

Reply

I would refer you to my written answer. It is early days yet and Universal Credit is adapting the welfare system to the changing patterns of work. DWP needs to listen carefully to everybody including the voluntary organisations.

25. Petitions

(a) Blocked Drains in Broad Lane Ward in Essington

Mrs Perry presented a petition from residents of the Broad Lane Ward in Essington concerning blocked drains along the roads in the ward, resulting in flooding on a regular basis.

(b) Blocked Drains and Flooding in Greenacres and School Lane, Coven

Mr Sutton presented a petition from local residents concerning blocked drains and flooding in Greenacres and School Lane, Coven

(c) Traffic Speeds and Junction Safety in Coates Heath, Eccleshall

Mr Worthington, on behalf of Mr Pert, presented a petition from residents of Coates Heath, Eccleshall concerning traffic speeds and junction safety in the village.

Chairman