

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 11 October 2018

Present:

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

Apologies for absence: Alan Dudson, Colin Greatorex, Phil Hewitt, Julia Jessel, Alastair Little and Ian Parry.

PART ONE

26. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

27. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 26 July 2018

RESOLVED – That, subject to the correct spelling of Cotes Heath on the final page, the minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

28. Chairman's Correspondence

Honorary Alderman Bob Fraser

The Chairman informed the Council of the death, on Wednesday, 19 September 2018, of former County Councillor Bob Fraser.

Mr Fraser represented the Dove (East Staffordshire) County Electoral Division on the County Council from 2005 to 2017. He served on a number of the Council's

Committees including the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee, Corporate Parenting Panel, Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee, Pensions Committee, Prosperity, Skills and Education Select Committee, Safeguarding and Public Protection Select Committee, Education Scrutiny Committee, Communities, Crime and Culture Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Review Committee and the Schools and Colleges Scrutiny Committee.

Mr Fraser also served as the Cabinet Member for Community Health between 2009 and 2010 and was Vice-Chairman of the County Council between 2011 and 2012 and also between 2015 and 2017. He was appointed as an Honorary Alderman in July 2017.

Members paid tribute to the contribution Mr Fraser had made during the time he served on the County Council, following which Members observed a one minute's silence in his memory.

29. Statement of the Leader of the Council

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

Strategic Plan and Financial Planning 2019-2024

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward referred to the call-in of the Cabinet's decision in respect of the draft budget proposals for 2019/20 which included the removal of the Staffordshire Local Community Fund and reductions in funding to the voluntary sector. She expressed concern that these reductions were at odds with the Council's "People Helping People" strategy. Mrs Woodward also indicated that, during the consideration of the call-in, the Leader had alluded to criteria for determining which services would not have the proposed financial reductions imposed should additional funding become available from Central Government. She asked if this "criteria" could be shared with members, particularly the Members of the MTFs Working Group and the Corporate Review Committee. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that the Council was continuing to lobby Central Government for additional funding, were seeking freedoms around the setting of the level of Council Tax and had also submitted a bid to become one of the pilot authorities for the retention of Business Rates. He added that if additional funding became available, then a set of criteria would be required to determine how such funding would best be utilised; this would most likely be around "invest to save" and be able to demonstrate the ability to deliver savings in future years. Mr Atkins also indicated that it was always the intention to diminish funding for the voluntary sector over a five-year period but that the current financial situation had meant that these reductions needed to be brought forward. He added that the Cabinet would work with the Corporate Review Committee, Select Committees and the MTFs Working Group to determine what that criteria should be.

Future Model of Libraries Service

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mrs Compton concerning the self-service pilot at Stafford Library, Mrs Heath indicated that the pilot had not yet commenced as there was a need to first get the necessary technology in place.

Mr Smith referred to the proposals to increase the number of community-led libraries in the County and highlighted the success of the community-led Library in Shenstone.

Enlargement of Holy Trinity CE (C) Primary School, Burton-upon-Trent (Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Mr P. White welcomed the proposals to enlarge Holy Trinity CE (C) Primary School, Burton-upon-Trent and indicated that this was one of a number of similar proposals to expand schools in Staffordshire to meet the increasing demand for places.

Mr Clarke expressed concern that that the enlargement of the school may result in additional problems associated with parking as the school was located on a main road. He enquired as to whether anything could be done to alleviate these difficulties. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that there were a number of possible solutions including the use of zig-zag road markings and the promotion of walking busses. He added that the local member was best placed to work with the school and the local community to find an appropriate solution.

First Quarter Integrated Performance Report (Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Mr B. Jones indicated that he welcomed the Cabinet's decision to approve the use of £2.160 million of Contingency to support Children's Services. In response, Mr Sutton indicated that maintaining a "good" children's service in the current financial climate was not easy and that credit needed to be paid to the commitment and dedication of the staff involved. Mr Sutherland added that there was currently just over 1,100 Looked After Children in Staffordshire and that this, together with increases in the cost of placements, had led to the need to inject additional funding into the service.

In response to a question from Mr D. Jones concerning increases in costs associated with Care Home placements, Mr Atkins confirmed that this was due to a combination of increases in demand and increases in the cost of placements.

Greenwood House, Burntwood (Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward paid tribute to Mr A. White for his tireless work in relation to the delivery of proposals for a new health centre on land owned by the council known locally as Greenwood House, Burntwood. She added that there were still primary health care needs which needed addressing in the west of Burntwood and hoped that Mr White would bring that focus again to ensure the provision of primary care services across the whole town. Mrs Fisher and Mr Deaville also welcomed the proposals for the new health centre and paid tribute to Mr White for his resilience and determination in delivering the proposals. In response, Mr White indicated that the planning application for the new Health Centre was due to be submitted at the end of November. He also commended the work of the officers who had been involved in the delivery of the

project. Mr White added that, with regard to Mrs Woodward's comments about the need for further primary care services in Burntwood, the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership envisaged integrated care teams across the County. How these integrated care teams were delivered would depend upon the shape of each locality; some may have a single hub (e.g. in urban areas) whereas others may have a dispersed team (e.g. in predominantly rural areas). He added that the County Council, working with its partners in the health sector, would continue to press on with addressing the health needs of the residents of Staffordshire.

Stafford History Centre

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Mr D. Davis expressed his disappointment that the Council's Round 2 funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Staffordshire History Centre project had been unsuccessful. In response, Mrs Heath indicated that she shared Mr Davis' disappointment and that the application was one of 30 schemes being considered by the Heritage Lottery Fund, of which only three had been selected to receive funding. She added that the project board was continuing to meet and were to consider how to move forward.

John Taylor Free School

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Mr P. White referred to the recent official opening of the John Taylor Free School in Tattenhill, Burton upon Trent which was Staffordshire's first brand new high school for over 25 years and would be capable of accommodating over 1,500 students. He commented on the quality of the design of the building and the fact that the project had been delivered on budget. He also paid tribute to Seddon Construction, who had built the school, ENTRUST who had designed the building and Mr Stuart Lane from the Council's Property Team who had managed the project. Mr White also indicated that there was an open invitation for Members to visit the school. Mr Wileman indicated that he echoed Mr White's comments and he also paid tribute to Mr P. White and the previous portfolio holder, Mr Adams, in bringing forward plans for meeting the increasing demand for school places across the County. Mr Deaville also added that the site of the new school covered 24 acres (30% of which was integrated within the National Forest) and that the building used 99,000 bricks and 95 miles of cabling. In responding to Members comments, Mr Atkins indicated that, over the next few years, the Cabinet would be bringing forward proposals to construct a number of additional new primary and secondary schools across Staffordshire.

Mill Green

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Mr Snape, Mr D. Davis, Mrs Woodward and Mr B. Jones welcomed the announcement that construction work for the provision of the Mill Green outlet village near Cannock had commenced. Mr Davis also expressed concern that he, as the local County Council member, had not been invited to attend the recent "sod cutting" ceremony. In response to questions from Members, Mr Winnington indicated that the County Council had worked closely with Cannock Chase District Council to bring the project forward and that the scheme was one of regional significance. He added that the County Council had

been working with the District Council to ensure that the appropriate supporting infrastructure was put in place. Mr Atkins also mentioned that, once open, up to 1,200 jobs could be created at the outlet village.

A50 Improvements

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mr Robinson concerning the recent decision of the Council's Planning Committee to approve an amendment to the planning consent for Project A on the A50 in Uttoxeter by the deletion of the slip roads which would link with the A50 with the A522, Mr Brookes indicated that the planning consent was approved on the grounds of public safety as, until Project B on the A50 was constructed, the slip roads would be a cul-de-sac. Mr Atkins and Mr Winnington added that Project B would be undertaken by Highways England and that the scheme needed to be redesigned in order to take account of recent developments in the vicinity of the proposed junction. Mr Deaville also indicated that Project B was essential as it would alleviate much of the congestion in Uttoxeter and the surrounding villages.

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Allocation

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins referred to the readjustment in the ERDF Euro/Sterling exchange rate which meant that there was still a significant ERDF allocation to be committed and asked which projects the funding would support. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that bids needed to be submitted to the Local Enterprise Partnership and that, due to the tight timescales, those bids should be for projects which could be implemented quickly.

Winter

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Mr Oates asked questions concerning the provision of grit bins; the availability of information on the "ice busters" scheme; and the myths surrounding liability should an individual fall in an area recently cleared of snow and/or ice. My Wileman also enquired as to when the review of grit bin locations was due to be completed. In response, Mrs Fisher indicated that the review of grit bins was to be completed shortly; she would be happy to speak to members regarding requests for new grit bins; and that she would arrange for the information on winter and the "ice busters" scheme on the Council's website to be reviewed and updated if necessary. Mr Deaville added that it was a myth that an individual could be held liable if someone fell on an area they had recently cleared of snow/ice unless that individual had, for example, tipped boiling water over the area which had subsequently frozen.

Mr Peters indicated that information was available on the County Council's website advising individuals about how to protect themselves from flu. In response, Mr A. White indicated that the eligibility for free flu vaccinations was set out on the NHS's website and that he would encourage anyone who was eligible to take advantage of the offer as this could help to ease the winter pressures on hospital beds and the health service generally.

Mrs Atkins stated that, in her view, winter health pressures would be greatly eased if the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership were not so obsessed in keeping community beds in the north of Staffordshire closed and that this was about cost cutting and not better outcomes for patients.

Mr Robinson enquired as to how the anticipated budget savings would affect the provision of services over the winter period. He also expressed the view that these savings could lead to a reduction in the numbers of people volunteering and also have a detrimental impact on the most vulnerable members of society. In response, Mr Deaville referred to the valuable contribution made by volunteers and he extended his thanks to them. He also indicated that there were no proposed reductions in the County's road gritting programme.

MindKind

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Several Members spoke in support of the launch of the Council's MindKind initiative which aimed to support and promote the mental health of employees. Mrs Edgeller explained that there was a lot of information about the initiative on the Council's website and Mr P White added that a number of members of staff were being trained as mental health first aiders. Mrs Hood enquired as to whether Members could also receive some training as this could prove valuable when working in their local communities. In response, Mr White indicated that the training could be made available to any Member who was interested and that he hoped that as many Members as possible would take advantage of the opportunity.

30. Recommendations to the Council

Financial Regulations

The Council were informed that there was a requirement to review and update the Financial Regulations on a regular basis to ensure that they remained accurate and fit for purpose. A detailed review had been undertaken to reflect the changes that had occurred following the introduction of the My Finance and My HR financial systems, together with minor amendments reflecting changes to job titles of relevant officers.

The Audit and Standards Committee recently considered the proposed revised Financial Regulations and resolved to recommend to the County Council that they be approved for inclusion within the Council's Constitution.

Mrs Woodward indicated that she supported the recommendation contained in the report as it provided a welcome tidying-up of the Financial Regulations. She also commended the work of the Council's Audit and Standards Committee.

RESOLVED – That the revised Financial Regulations be approved for inclusion within the Constitution.

31. Appointment of Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Review Committee

Mr Atkins moved, and Mr Alan White seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED – That Mr David Williams be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Review Committee.

32. Outcomes of Overview and Scrutiny Work: January - June 2018

Mr Brookes paid tribute members of the Council's Select Committees and the officers who support them.

In response to a question from Mrs Atkins concerning how much money had been wasted on East Staffordshire CCG's contract for urgent care services with Virgin which, a large part of which, had been terminated, Mr McMahon indicated that he did not have the information.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

33. Questions

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

Question

Can the Portfolio Holder update the Council on her attempts to resolve the longstanding staffing issues that prevent the effective running of the 'Community' Highways team in Newcastle? This has led to delays in the implementation of Members' Divisional Highway Plan priorities and great frustration for the public at the lack of action on important highway issues that in this case do not result from any cuts to funding.

Reply

The Community Highways team perform a number of significant and strategic functions within the Infrastructure+ Partnership, which include: promoting the council's People Helping People initiative; enabling the transformation to digital Highways information; ensuring local insight informs the development of forward programmes of work, policies and procedures; and dealing with substantial volumes of correspondence day-to-day from a variety of stakeholders.

An extremely important element of the role is also to work with Members, inviting comment and challenge on strategic programmes of work and to facilitate the delivery of local community highway priorities through the Member's Divisional Highways Programme. There are just four local Community Infrastructure Liaison Managers across the county leading this work and every effort is made to ensure that the near 100 locally prioritised DHP initiatives are delivered, though a variety of delivery partners, within each financial year.

Our workforce is the most important asset we have for making a positive difference in the lives of Staffordshire people and they will continue to be supported with the skills, tools and confidence to do their jobs well. Plans have been developed to restructure

the team, enable effective succession planning and to resolve a number of longstanding vacancies and staff absences within the team. However, progression is currently subject to resources being available within the council's support services functions.

Supplementary Question

Will the Cabinet Member consider holding a meeting in Newcastle-under-Lyme with the local members about delivering our DHPs and can the responsible Commissioner also be involved?

Reply

Yes, I would be happy to do that.

Mrs Compton asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Given the possibility that Jaguar/Landrover might leave the UK and relocate to Europe after BREXIT, has the County Council had any discussions about this threat?

Reply

The Commissioner for Business & Enterprise, Anthony Hodge, sits on the i54 Executive Steering Group which periodically holds its meeting at the JLR Engine Manufacturing Centre (EMC) on i54, where JLR senior personnel attend a part of the meeting. The latest such meeting was held at the EMC in September 2018 with the Deputy Plant Director, and the UK Head of Property for JLR present. Although Brexit was mentioned and the impact on sales due to the issues around diesel, the feedback from the Deputy Plant Director was upbeat, and he was forecasting the output of the 1 millionth engine by the end of the year.

There were no statements about JLR pulling out of the UK. In the last month JLR, as a company, has taken on 500 new graduates and apprentices in the UK.

Supplementary Question

Is it true that the Head of Jaguar Landrover last week, at the Paris Motor Show, stated that they may relocate to Europe?

Reply

Not to my knowledge but I will ask Anthony Hodge, the Council's Commissioner for Business and Enterprise, to find out and get back to you.

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

Question

Residents and I have been shocked at the poor level of traffic enforcement in the Talke and Red Street Division. Despite the fact I have raised this as a serious issue with Highways officers and the contracted enforcement team, very little has been done to challenge vehicle users parking illegally, specifically in Church Street and Woodshutts Street, Butt Lane. Can the Cabinet Member for Highways please assist me in making sure the traffic enforcement team do more to enforce parking restrictions such as double yellow lines?

Reply

The County Council's Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) powers are limited to the enforcement of parking restrictions, such as Double Yellow Lines. They do not include powers of enforcement to prevent things like footway parking or driveway obstruction, both of which remain the responsibility of the Police.

There are only short lengths of parking restrictions in place on Church Street and Woodshutts Street. In both locations the parking restrictions are designed to protect their junctions with the busy A34, whilst leaving the remaining areas free for what is mainly local resident's parking.

Since 1 April this year the Council's Civil Parking Enforcement team has visited Church Street 28 times and Woodshutts Street 5 times. On each occasion there has been no parking on the double yellow lines and consequently no Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) have been issued.

If the local Member can advise of specific times when parking on the Double Yellow lines is occurring in either of these locations, then the enforcement team will attempt to undertake observations at these times.

Supplementary Question

I've looked at the response and do find it hard to believe that traffic enforcement teams have been to that particular location 28 times and have not found anyone breaking the law. I was there yesterday and there was someone breaking the law at that particular location. I have notified officers and the enforcement team separately about particular peak times when the issues arise and so can I ask the Cabinet Member to let me know when the contract with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, who deal with parking enforcement, is due to be up for review, and does she believe that we are currently getting value for money and an effective enforcement service across the County?

Reply

Yes, I will happily get all that information for you and I would also be quite happy to come up to your Division to see these issues for myself.

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

Question

On 26 September 2018, the County Council's Property Sub-Committee met to consider whether to support a financial contribution to Kidsgrove Sports Centre re-opening. I've long argued for the County Council to make a financial contribution so that residents in Kidsgrove have a decent leisure facility that meets local needs. As a matter of public interest can the Leader of the Council inform me precisely why the decision to make a one-off financial contribution to Kidsgrove Sports Centre was deferred and could he also indicate exactly when this decision has been deferred to?

Reply

The County Council has no direct responsibility for the provision of leisure services. Kidsgrove Sports Centre is no longer required for use by the adjacent school since its rebuilding in 2016.

Given this and the fact that it is an old and expensive building presumably it was too expensive for Newcastle Borough Council to continue, therefore they closed the operation in 2017.

The County Council has recently been asked to transfer the centre. That request was presented to the Property Sub-Committee but more information was required in relation to the Council's obligations for the property, the current costs and potential value of the property in order to make a fully informed decision before making the significant contribution asked for.

The next Property Sub-Committee meeting is scheduled for the 7th November.

Supplementary Question

Can the Leader confirm that it is the County Council who owns the Kidsgrove Sports Centre building; that it is the County Council who are currently responsible for the building; and why was a recommendation for the County Council to make a significant financial contribution towards Kidsgrove Sports Centre laid before the Property Sub-Committee, which the Leader chairs, before all information was obtained to make an informed decision on the day. Also, does he accept that this has caused further concern and anxiety for the community in Kidsgrove who want to see the County Council play their part in investing in a facility which they own?

Reply

Yes, the County Council owns the building. The Property Sub-Committee will look at the building and property part of the proposal. It is Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's responsibility to provide leisure facilities and to help community interest groups to deliver those facilities. The Property Sub-Committee, which I chair, only looks at property matters.

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

Question

What is the obligation of the County Council to ensure street signs are not obscured by street trees and what discussions has the County Council had with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council in respect of the trees in Leek town centre?

Reply

The County Council has a responsibility to ensure that street signs are not obscured by trees in order to protect the safety of highway users. This often includes ensuring that third-party owners, such as District Councils or adjacent land-owners, carry out their legal duty to maintain trees so as not to cause a hazard to highway users.

Obscured road signs are identified as part of routine highway safety inspections. They are risk-assessed and prioritised for action alongside all other highway defects. Determining the level of risk includes consideration of things like:

- The nature of the sign – for example is it mandatory or advisory; and
- Are there other signs, road markings or features that communicate the same message?

With regards to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Cllr. Atkins will be aware that many discussions have taken place over the management of the District Council's trees since the Public Realm Improvement scheme was implemented in 2014. Cllr Atkins has herself very helpfully facilitated many of these in her role as local Member.

These discussions relate to one particular problem at the junction of Bath Street and Derby Street, where a small District Council owned tree is obscuring a 'one-way' direction sign. There are a number of easy solutions, including relocation of the tree to an alternative planter box and replacing it with low-height plants, but unfortunately this action has not yet taken place.

I would request that Cllr. Atkins helps to rekindle these discussions and help to implement a solution as soon as possible.

In the meantime, a number of other signs and road markings clearly communicate the message that Derby Street is 'one-way', meaning that the risk to road users is quite minimal.

Supplementary Question

Can I ask the Cabinet Member to intervene, as soon as possible, to resolve this problem and either move the planter or the sign?

Reply

I will do what I can.

34. Petitions

(a) Request for a Zebra Crossing on The Avenue, Kidsgrove

Mr Robinson presented a petition from parents and staff at St Thomas' Nursery calling for the installation of a zebra crossing on The Avenue, Kidsgrove.

(b) Safety of Children Walking to Codsall High School

Mr James presented a petition from residents of Perton regarding the cost of transport and the safety of children walking to Codsall High School.

(c) Request for Traffic Management Measures along Stubbsfield Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme

Mr Sweeney presented a petition from local residents seeking traffic management measures along Stubbsfield Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme.

(d) Request for Traffic Management Measures along Grove Street, Westwood Terrace and Jubilee Terrace, Leek

Mrs Atkins presented a petition from residents of Grove Street, Westwood Terrace and Jubilee Terrace, Leek requesting traffic management measures along the roads.

(e) Road Safety Improvements along Clay Lake, Endon

Mr Flunder presented a petition from residents of Endon and Brown Edge seeking road safety improvements along Clay Lake.

Chairman