

Minutes of the County Council Meeting - 22 July 2010

Present:

Attendance		
Ben Adams	Matthew Ellis	Geoff Morrison
Philip Atkins	Terry Finn	Barrie Mycock
Ray Barron	John Francis	David Nixon
Erica Bayliss	Bob Fraser	Michael Oates
Brian Beale	Gill Heath	Ian Parry
John Bernard	Mark Heenan	Kath Perry
David Billson	Christina Jebb, FRSA	Steve Povey
Len Bloomer	Ivan Jennings	Robert Reade
Henry Butter	Phil Jones	Rex Roberts, OBE
Frank Chapman	Philip Jones	John Rowley
John Cooper	Mike Lawrence	Liz Staples
Pat Corfield	Ian Lawson	Stephen Sweeney
Dylis Cornes	Frank Lewis, MBE	Simon Tagg
Peter Davies	Geoff Locke	Steve Tranter
Derek Davis, OBE	Robert Marshall	John Wells
William Day	Geoffrey Martin	Alan White
Veronica Downes	Mike Maryon	
Ray Easton	Mary Maxfield	

Apologies for absence: Paul Atkins, Lee Bates, Peter Beresford, Tim Corbett, Janet Eagland, Derrick Huckfield, Kathy Lamb, Jeremy Oates and Mark Winnington

PART ONE

19. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

The following Members declared interests in accordance with Standing Order 16:-

Member	Minute Nos.	Interest	Reason
D. Billson P. Jones M. Lawrence R.J. Marshall Mrs. K. Perry	22	Personal	Governor of Pendrell Hall College

20. Confirmation of the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 20 May 2010

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2010 be confirmed.

21. Chairman's Correspondence

Queen's Birthday Honours 2010

The Chairman informed the Council that Anne Beer, Senior Consumer Advice Officer within the Council's Social Care and Health Directorate, had been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for her services to consumers.

She also indicated that the Lord Lieutenant for Staffordshire, Mr. James Hawley had been appointed as a Knight Commander of the Victorian Order (KCVO) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Members extended their congratulations to Sir James Hawley and Anne Beer on their achievements.

Training Quality Standard

The Chairman informed Members that the Council's Quality Learning Services (QLS) had gained the Training Quality Standard (TQS) award. The award was given to the best organisations delivering training to employers. The Standard highlighted high quality, high impact training, by looking at an organisation's responsiveness, flexibility, expertise and commitment to continuous improvement. Following rigorous assessment in March this year, QLS was advised that it had met all of these components of the Standard for both its general responsiveness to customers and for its services to the children's workforce in schools. Whilst one other county authority had to-date achieved TQS recognition for its own internal staff training, QLS within Staffordshire County Council was unique to have achieved it for its external facing services as well.

Chairman's Support for Charities

The Chairman informed the Council that, during her current year in office, she had decided to support a range of Staffordshire based charities, particularly those involved with carers and young people, and also "Help the Heroes".

Completion of works in the Council Chamber

The Chairman informed the Council that the works in the Council Chamber were progressing well and it was anticipated that the Chamber would be back in use in time for the Council meeting in October.

22. Leader's Statement

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work; his plans for the Council; and an overview of decisions taken by the Cabinet (and Portfolio Holders) since the previous meeting of the Council.

Waste Facility Procurement – Project W2R

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mr John Rowley concerning the difference between the standard and variant bids for the W2R project, Mr Robert Marshall explained that, under the standard bid, the County Council took the risk with regard to variations in the price of electricity whilst, under the variant bid, the price to the County Council was guaranteed by the contractor and it was therefore the contractor who took the risk if the price was to fall below the guaranteed price.

Burntwood Household Waste Recycling Centre

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

In response to questions from members, Mr Robert Marshall indicated that the proposal to close Burntwood Household Waste Recycling Centre had been placed on hold whilst a review of Household Waste Recycling Centre provision across the County was undertaken. He also confirmed that, as part of this review process Lichfield District Council and Burntwood Town Council would be consulted in respect of any proposals relating to the Burntwood site.

Government's Emergency Budget and Spending Review

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Mr Derek Davis indicated that he was disappointed with the announcement that Cabinet were seeking savings in excess of those requested by Central Government. He added that the £120m to be saved over the next three years equated to approximately 5000 jobs.

Mr Steve Povey indicated that he echoed the concerns raised by Mr Davis and expressed disappointment that the proposed cuts were announced to the press before members of the County Council had been informed.

Mr Simon Tagg added that the Assets and Budget Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 21 July had received a presentation from the Director of Finance on the medium term financial strategy including details of where proposed savings were to be made.

Mr Ray Easton indicated that he was disappointed that the proposed savings included the withdrawal of financial support for the Hednesford – Walsall Railway.

Mr Ben Adams responded to members concerns by explaining that there would be considerably less funding available to the County Council over the next few years and that the Authority needed to take urgent action to deal with this. Mr Parry added that the current financial crisis was not of the County Council's making but that the Authority would "defend to the hilt the meeting of people's basic needs". He added that the way services were delivered may change and that the County Council needed to cut out waste and duplication.

The Leader of the Council thanked Members for their views and constructive comments. He indicated that the County Council was committed to the principle of "localism" and through this would identify what communities needed as opposed to dictating what

services were to be provided. The Council's main priority was to protect vulnerable children and adults.

He added that the anticipated savings of £7.9m in 2010/11 could be met through efficiencies and although achieving savings of approximately 30% over the next three years sounded high, it was hoped that these would be achieved through flushing out inefficiencies and through innovation in the way in which the services were provided.

He concluded by indicating that Members would still be able to assist their local communities through the monies made available via the Staffordshire Local Community Fund.

Local Health Services

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

In response to questions from Members in relation to the government's Whitepaper on Health, Mr Mathew Ellis indicated that the thrust of the Whitepaper was a shift of power away from Primary Care Trusts to GP's directly and to local NHS Boards. It would therefore be a local focus on local needs and the County Council would have a role in supporting GP's by helping to integrate its services seamlessly with those provided by the health sector.

Mr Ellis went on to explain how, under the White Paper the County Council would have a greater responsibility for public health and he also outlined the arrangements for overview and scrutiny of health services through the creation of a new body called "Health Watch".

The Leader of the Council undertook to bring a further update on progress in relation to the White Paper in his Statement to the Council meeting in October.

Organisational Redesign at Leadership Level

The Leader of the Council informed Members that, since April, he had been working with key Members and senior officers to review every aspect of the Council's work and to develop an operating model for service delivery which would transform the way in which the Council delivered its services and would deliver better outcomes for residents.

This work marked the beginning of a transformation agenda through which, over the next 2 – 3 years, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) would be required to take responsibility for effectively developing strategies and commissioning outcomes in support of those strategies.

Dynamic and visionary leadership was essential to drive forward the development of strong and effective partnerships with other public, private and third sector organisations in support of the delivery of those strategies and plans and to commission effective services that would see the desired outcomes being implemented.

As a result, it was proposed that the senior leadership team be reshaped to be fit for the future. The Cabinet at its meeting on 21 July 2010, approved the proposed new structure and it was therefore proposed to recommend to the Council:

“(i) That a Special Committee be established to deal with all the recruitment and human resource issues relating to the establishment of the new structure in replacement of the existing leadership team structure.

(ii) That the Special Committee consists of seven members (in accordance with the political balance of the Council) with the following membership:

- The Chairman of the County Council (or nominee)
- The Leader of the County Council plus two Cabinet Members nominated by the Leader of the County Council
- The Leader of the Liberal Democrat and Staffordshire Independent Alliance Group (or nominee)
- Two further non-Cabinet Members appointed by the Leader of the County Council”

Mr. Povey moved, and Mr. Locke seconded, the following amendment:

“That paragraph “(ii)” of the recommendations be amended by the deletion of the words “the Leader of the Liberal Democrat and Staffordshire Independent Alliance Group” and their replacement with the words “a leader of one of the opposition groups.”

Following a vote, the Chairman declared the amendment lost.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received.

(b) That a Special Committee be established to deal with all the recruitment and human resource issues relating to the establishment of the new structure in replacement of the existing leadership team structure.

(c) That the Special Committee consists of seven members (in accordance with the political balance of the Council) with the following membership:

- The Chairman of the County Council (or nominee)
- The Leader of the County Council plus two Cabinet Members nominated by the Leader of the County Council
- The Leader of the Liberal Democrat and Staffordshire Independent Alliance Group (or nominee)
- Two further non-Cabinet Members appointed by the Leader of the County Council.

23. Questions

Mr. David Nixon asked the following question of the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Question

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government is abolishing most of the Building Schools for the Future Programme as being wasteful (£600 million spent on consultants alone and tax-payers having to pay borrowed money back during the next 30 years). Does the portfolio holder welcome this news as a return to sanity?

Reply

I do not welcome the news that Staffordshire has lost a significant investment in Tamworth and Rugeley schools. The package that Staffordshire has worked hard to put together is a compelling and robust plan to transform learning and outcomes for young people. It is disappointing that this was halted at the 11th hour.

We have always said that we believed that the BSF process was ludicrously over-bureaucratic, expensive and time-consuming. I firmly believe that as an Authority we could procure school building programmes at far lower cost and much quicker than the previous Labour Government BSF system. Therefore to review the BSF programme does signal a return to sanity. I will though, continue to fight for additional capital to invest in our unfinished projects in Tamworth and Rugeley and future projects where replacement or refurbishment of school estate is necessary.

I believe it is the Government's intention to continue to invest in school building renewal as soon as a sensible and affordable process can be constructed.

Supplementary Question

Would the Cabinet Member therefore welcome proposals by schools to opt out of local education authority control?

Reply

We have no prescription about school governance arrangements as, in Staffordshire, there has long been a "mixed economy" as far as school governance arrangements are concerned. We have a number of schools which already have trust status and others who are applying for such status. What we are interested in is good schools and if changes to governance can contribute to that, we very much support them.

Mr. David Nixon asked the following question of the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Question

The Conservative/ Liberal Democrat coalition now wishes many schools to opt out of L.E.A. control. Swedish free schools now get Grade Point Average scores 20 points higher than in state schools. Swedish free schools improve standards across the local authority by leading the competition. Parents, as consumers of education are happier with free schools (92%) compared to state schools (63%). Charter schools (free from L.E.A. control) in the USA also have higher standards than state schools. If schools free from L.E.A. control bring higher standards is Staffordshire County Council going to push schools into becoming free, seeing that the clarion call is always, 'we must raise standards'?

Reply

We support any governance model that will offer improvement. It is perhaps worth noting that state schools already have a very high degree of freedom and autonomy, through devolved budgets and LMS, which empowers them to target all aspects of performance improvement. The County Council holds a strategic and supportive role. Whilst we have many outstanding schools in Staffordshire, and many which are rapidly improving, we are aware of the need to support schools that are coasting or not satisfactorily improving. We are by no means complacent about raising attainment in our schools.

Supplementary Question

Is the County Council going to push for grammar schools contrary to the wishes of the new conservative/liberal government?

Reply

It is unlikely as it really does not matter how you “badge” a school. What really matters is how those schools manage teaching and learning and target attainment.

Mrs. Dylis Cornes asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment

Question

In our local Evening Sentinel last Thursday there was an article re the spending cuts to be implemented by the County Council. It reads:

£7.9 savings programme includes:

£2.5 million from children’s services;

£2.2 million from highways;

£650,000 cut from road safety

£1.5 million from council reserves

Further down the article it also states that the cuts will affect Staffordshire's Safer Routes to School programme.

In view of the fact that the schools in part of my division have, after many years of promises, started our Safer Routes to School, can you tell me how this will affect this programme? I have already been told that there is not a budget for my area as has been the practise in the past, but we would have to see what we wanted, and what could be found. How do I tell my young people that their safety no longer matters? In some schools, in particular the High School, the pupils have been involved in deciding what they would like to see for their safety.

Reply

This year's grant allocations to local authorities for highway improvements have recently been reduced by 25%. In Staffordshire, this means that schemes in the highways capital programme to the value of some £2.5M have had to be deferred. Obviously this has involved difficult choices and some elements of the Safer Routes to School Programme have been delayed. Having said that, the Programme has been running for many years and has largely achieved its original purpose with all priority schools; that is those with a record of accidents on the school journey, having been completed. Of course, the safety of our young people is of the utmost importance and they are the primary focus of our road safety teams who continue to deliver tailor made programmes in schools. Additionally, we are pressing ahead with our 20mph plans and the deployment of speed indication devices to reduce speeds around schools..

Supplementary Question

Is there going to be any money for safer routes to school schemes?

Reply

I have had a look at your division and I have noted that there has been significant expenditure on road safety schemes over the past few years including travel plans, road safety education, cycle training, erection of a permanent vehicle activated speed sign, support to introduce a community speed watch scheme and therefore I think that you will agree that we see that the safety of children is paramount and that your division is getting its fair share of road safety funding.

Mrs. Christina Jebb asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

Question

The Home office requires a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) to be operating within every police force area by 2011.

(i) Would you confirm whether and when the County Council agreed to be part of a partnership project to provide this?

(ii) When does the County Council intend to fully commit financially to the partnership scheme to provide a SARC in Staffordshire, as most of the scheme's other partners have already done?

Reply

(i) The County Council has agreed to be part of a partnership project to provide a SARC in Staffordshire by August 2011. The County Council was approached in December 2008 to be part of the partnership. Other partners had already been approached and the County Council was invited later, once it had been realised that a key partner had been omitted from discussions. (The six partners involved are NHS Stoke, North Staffs PCT, South Staffs PCT, Staffordshire Police, Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council.)

(ii) The County Council has made a financial commitment to the SARC. It has paid the full amount requested in 2009-10 (£10,000) and the full amount requested in 2010-11 (£11,000). The County Council has also offered to make an ongoing financial commitment to the SARC of £11,000 per annum ie maintaining the level of funding paid in 2010-11. Discussions are taking place with the other partners about funding the amounts requested for 2011-12 (£25,000) and 2012-13 and beyond (£55,000 per annum for at least 25 years). The County Council has not committed to funding these higher amounts given the current financial uncertainties. It has, however, offered to pay an amount that it feels is reasonable and which it could realistically find in future years. Whilst other partners may have verbally committed to funding the higher amounts quoted, it is understood that to date only two partners (NHS Stoke and South Staffs PCT) have made that commitment in writing.

The County Council's Chief Executive will be meeting with the Chief Executive of NHS Stoke and the Assistant Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police with responsibility for the SARC on 3rd August to discuss the finances of the SARC in more detail.

Supplementary Question

Would you confirm that should there be any change in partnership arrangements such as the abolition of PCT's, the County Council remains firm in its commitment to victims of sexual assault?

Reply

I do not think I am in a position to offer guarantees of any sort but I can absolutely confirm our commitment to a multi-agency approach to this issue and many other aspects of community safety that are of concern to the whole community

Mr. Ray Easton asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environment

Question

What procedures are in place to ensure that Parish Councils, heritage groups and the owners and occupiers of buildings are consulted when street lights are repositioned close to Listed Buildings and in Conservation Areas?

Reply

Anything that involves the amendment / improvement of street lighting within conservation areas is included within the service delivery requirements of the street lighting PFI (Private Finance Initiative) contract. The PFI service provider, EON, should consult with the local district / borough conservation officer. They are best placed to understand the local conservation issues and to liaise with the parish council and other interested groups to deal with local concerns.

If the district or borough does not have a conservation officer then the PFI contractor should liaise direct with the parish council.

No direct consultation is undertaken with individual property owners, as any conservation issues should have been addressed through the parish consultation. The contractor should notify all residents affected directly by the proposed works one month in advance of the start date.

Supplementary Question

I believe that the existing procedures do not work. Therefore, what procedures are you going to put in place to improve this situation and when?

Reply

I think this issue can be best resolved by a round table discussion between you, I and the officer responsible for street lighting at which we can address the particular issues to which you refer. I will put the necessary arrangements in place.

24. Notices of Motion

Mr. Philip Atkins moved, and Mr. Mike Lawrence seconded the following motion under Standing Order No. 11:

“The County Council believes a Local Enterprise Partnership, principally based on Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, led by business with public and private sector partners, local universities and colleges is the right vehicle to drive forward the regeneration of our Staffordshire economy and will put democratic accountability at the heart of the partnership, combined with the knowledge, expertise and drive of the private sector and provision of skills critical to our economic future.

The Council also believes that by all working together, using all our resources and skills we will achieve the long term changes needed in our economy and the Council will write to all these partners inviting them to join with the County Council in focusing their efforts to achieve our common economic goal.”

Several members spoke in support of the motion and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED – That the motion be carried.

25. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police Authority

The County Council were informed of the proposal by the police authority to appoint a new Chief Executive on the retirement of the current post holder in October 2010. Several members expressed concern that the Police Authority had failed to take the opportunity to see whether savings could be made by sharing a joint Chief Executive, and back office arrangements generally, with another public body. They therefore requested the Leader of the Council to write to the Chairman of the Police Authority to express the Council’s concerns and to request that the Police Authority delay appointing the new Chief Executive until the possibility of joint working arrangements had been properly explored.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Periodic Report of the Staffordshire Police Authority be adopted.

(b) That the Leader of the Council be authorised to write to the Police Authority to convey the Council's real concern and disappointment that, before appointing the new Chief Executive, the Police Authority had failed to take the opportunity to see whether savings could be made by sharing a joint Chief Executive, and back office arrangements generally, with another public body.

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

RESOLVED – That the Periodic Report of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority be adopted.

27. Petitions

Request for the Introduction of a School Crossing Patrol on the A34 at Bridgtown

Mr. Pat Corfield presented a petition from pupils at Bridgetown Primary School requesting the introduction of a school crossing patrol on the A34 at Bridgtown.

Request for the widening of part of Gorse Lane

Mr. Ray Easton presented a petition from residents of Heather Close, Brereton, requesting the widening of part of Gorse Lane in order to improve access to Heather Close.

Request for Junction Improvements at Brocton Crossroads

Mr. Len Bloomer presented a petition from local residents requesting junction improvement works by the provision of a roundabout or traffic signals on the A34 at Brocton Crossroads.

Request for the introduction of a 40 mph Speed limit between the A500 and Audley Village

Mrs. Dylis Cornes presented a petition from local residents requesting the introduction of a 40 mph speed limit between the A500 and Audley village.

Objections to Proposed Extraction of Gravel at Wychnor and Alrewas

Mr. Robert Marshall, on behalf of Mrs. Janet Eagland, presented a petition opposing the proposal to extract gravel from sites at Wychnor and Alrewas.

Chairman

Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.