

Minutes of the Annual County Council Meeting held on 24 May 2018

Present:

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

Apologies for absence: Mark Deaville, Phil Hewitt, Julia Jessel, Alastair Little, Ian Parry and Jeremy Pert.

PART ONE

1. Election of the Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year

Mr James moved, and Mr Wileman seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED – That Mr Michael Greatorex be elected Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year.

2. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 22 March 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 22 March 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4. Election of the Vice-Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year

Mrs Wilson moved, and Mr B Williams seconded, and it was:-

RESOLVED – That Mrs Kath Perry be appointed Vice-Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year.

5. Chairman's Correspondence

Former County Councillor Gwilym Roberts

The Council were informed of the death, on Thursday, 15 March 2018, of former County Councillor Gwilym Edfrwd Roberts. Mr Roberts represented the Brereton and Ravenhill (Cannock Chase) County Electoral Division on the County Council between 1985 and 1993 and also between 2001 and 2009.

He served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Highways Committee, Libraries, Arts and Archives Committee, Social Services Committee, Social Care Scrutiny Committee, Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Policy Scrutiny Committee and the Pensions Committee. He also served as Chairman of the Audit Committee and the Resources Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Prior to becoming a Member of the County Council, Mr Roberts served as Member of Parliament for Cannock between 1974 and 1983.

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

Chairman's Civic Service

The Chairman extended an invitation to Members to attend the annual Civic Church Service which was to take place at St. Mary's Church, Stafford on Sunday, 17 June commencing at 12:00 noon.

Microsoft UK Digital Skills Live Event

Members were informed that that Microsoft UK Digital Skills Live was in Stafford town centre. Delivered in partnership with Microsoft UK and Staffordshire University, this was an exciting event for people of all ages and stages who were hungry to improve their digital skills. The Digital Skills Programme aimed to provide everybody with free basic online skills, nurture young people's passion for computer science and provide essential training to businesses and IT professionals who need to develop their understanding of the cloud. The Chairman encouraged all Members to go along to the event following the Council Meeting.

6. 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.

Quarter 4 2017/18 Integrated Performance Report (Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward, Mr Philip White and Mr Atkins referred to the important role played by Governors in helping to build strong schools and improving performance. Mrs Woodward also encouraged Members to consider becoming a Governor of the school(s) in their area. Mr Atkins also stressed the importance of community involvement in the management of schools.

Enlargement of St Stephens Primary School, Fradley and Baldwins Gate CE (VC) Primary School

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Mrs Eagland and Mr Northcott expressed their support for the proposals to enlarge St Stephens Primary School, Fradley and Baldwins Gate CE (VC) Primary School.

Pothole Investment

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward expressed her concern at the time it was taking to repair some highway defects and the consequent dangers this could cause for motorists and cyclists. Mr Smith added that, now that the winter was over, he was seeing tremendous improvements in the condition of the roads in his electoral division. Mrs Fisher responded by indicating that where Members had concerns about potentially dangerous highway defects, she would be happy to look into those issues. She added that there was currently around 10,000 potholes across the County and that, since 1 April, 3,000 repairs had been undertaken and that improvements were beginning to be seen. Mr Atkins praised the work of the highway teams in dealing with the backlog of repairs and indicated that delays had occurred over the winter period due to the adverse weather conditions.

HS2 petitioning

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Several Members expressed concern in relation to the timeliness and accuracy of information provided by HS2 and also indicated that the company was not listening to the concerns of the Council and local communities. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that the following the petitioning in relation to Phase 2A, the select Committee had just issued its report. He indicated that MPs had rejected calls for a longer tunnel between Whitmore Heath and Madeley, on the basis that it would cost too much. He added that the county council had petitioned the committee on 60 items, and had successfully secured changes elsewhere on the route in Staffordshire. Mr Tittley referred to the lorry routing during the construction phase of HS2 and the severe detrimental impact would have on road users and businesses particularly in the area around Fradley Park. Mrs Eagland indicated that she had recently attended a meeting with representatives of HS2 and it was clear that the company had no understanding of the impact of the proposed works on local residents and businesses. Mrs Hood also spoke about the impact of the proposed railhead near Stone which would see around 569 HGV movements per day along Yarnfield Lane. Mr Colin Greatorex spoke about the importance of the construction traffic sticking to the designated routes and indicated that HS2 had agreed to paint their construction vehicles orange so that it would be easy to identify those which failed to keep to the designated routes. Mr Atkins concluded by

indicating that the construction of HS2 was a complex project and would have a major impact on some parts of the County, including disruption to road travel. He added that the County Council was continuing to help local residents get their voices heard.

Staffordshire Day

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward spoke about the marketing arrangements in the lead-up to Staffordshire Day and how these needed to resonate with all communities across the County. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that the campaign was a great success, helped to support local businesses and gave people pride in the county in which they lived. Mr Colin Greatorex, Mr Brookes and Mr Atkins also spoke about the value of such campaigns to the local tourist industry and the additional spend that was generated in the Staffordshire economy.

Ironman 70.3 Staffordshire

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Mr Price referred to the Ironman 70.3 event and how this would boost the local economy as well as showcasing Staffordshire nationally.

Branston Locks

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Mr Brookes indicated that he welcomed the investment made at Branston Locks, particularly with regard to the provision of a new Secondary School. In response, Mr Philip White indicated that this was the first Secondary School to be built in Staffordshire for a generation and would open in September. Mr Atkins spoke about the need to get the necessary infrastructure in place before building new housing and added that the Branston Locks development would open up 50 acres of land for development and would give rise to many new job opportunities.

7. Recommendations to the Council

(a) Independent Remuneration Panel Appointment

Members were informed that the County Council was required to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to provide advice and recommendations to the Council on its Members' Allowances Scheme.

Leslie Trigg was appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel in 2014 for a period of four years, which expired in March 2018.

The Independent Remuneration Panel currently had two members, appointed by the County Council in October 2017. The minimum number of people permitted to sit on the Independent Remuneration Panel was three and it was therefore recommended that the County Council agree that Leslie Trigg's term of office be extended for a further period of 12 months.

It was also noted that the Council at its meeting on 12 October 2017, agreed “That the Audit and Standards Committee be requested to carry out a further recruitment exercise for IRP members in 2018.” This recruitment process was underway and Leslie Trigg’s experience would provide continuity to the Panel.

RESOLVED – That the period of office for Leslie Trigg as a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel be extended for a further period of 12 months to 31 March 2019.

(b) Proposed Changes to the Constitution – Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee

Members were informed that the membership of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee comprised 13 County Council members and one member representative from each of the eight District and Borough Councils in Staffordshire. All had full voting rights. Historically the joint working arrangements were successful; however more recently, due to other time pressures, there had been a notable decline in the regularity of attendance of District and Borough members at meetings of the Committee. The importance of local member representation at Healthy Staffordshire meetings had been discussed at a joint meeting of Staffordshire’s Council Leaders. That meeting requested a change to the terms of reference of the Select Committee to permit the appointment of substitute member level representation (with full voting rights) for the District and Boroughs.

Mrs Woodward expressed her support for the proposals and asked whether, in addition to the nominated member, the substitute member may also be permitted to attend meetings of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee as an official observer so as to aid continuity. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that he would have no objections to this but it should be borne in mind that the relevant District/Borough Council would be responsible for the payment of their travelling allowances.

Mr Smith and Mrs Atkins indicated that those persons who were appointed as the nominated and substitute members must have sufficient time available to enable them to fulfil their roles as Members of the Committee.

The Council were also informed that where a NHS body or Health Service provider consulted more than one local authority’s health function about proposals for substantial development or variation of services, in accordance with Regulation 30 of ‘The Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013, those local authorities were required to appoint a mandatory joint overview and scrutiny committee for the purposes of the consultation. Only that Joint Committee could respond to the consultation and require the provision of information and/or the attendance at their meetings by representatives of the consulting Body/Provider to help them form a view. The Accountable Officer for the CCGs in North Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent had contacted the County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council to request the establishment of a mandatory Joint Committee to consider proposals relating to community hospitals in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The formal consultation process was expected to commence in early Autumn 2018. The Chairman of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee had met with his counterpart at Stoke-on-Trent City Council and agreed on proposed membership and Terms of Reference for the Joint Committee

RESOLVED – (a) That approval be given to amendments to the Terms of Reference of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee to:

- (i) Permit substitute member level representation for the District and Borough Councils.
- (ii) Include provision for participation in Joint Committees by the inclusion of the wording detailed at paragraph 11 of the report

(b) That approval be given to the Membership and Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee Re Future of Local Health Services in Northern Staffordshire as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

8. Annual Report on the Staffordshire Local Community Fund 2017

RESOLVED – That the annual report on the Staffordshire Local Community Fund 2017 be received.

9. Committee Membership

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

RESOLVED – That the Members indicated below serve on the Committees indicated for the period up to the annual Council meeting in 2019:-

Corporate Review Committee	
Charlotte Atkins	Jonathan Price
David Brookes	Ian Parry
John Francis	Martyn Tittley
Colin Greatorex	Stephen Sweeney
Bob Spencer	David Williams
Johnny McMahon	Susan Woodward
Jeremy Oates	

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee	
Ron Clarke	Ian Parry
Tina Clements	Kyle Robinson
Keith Flunder	David Smith
Bryan Jones	Simon Tagg
Julia Jessel	Bernard Williams

Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee	
Ann Beech	Jason Jones
Mike Davies	Natasha Pullen
John Francis	Paul Snape

Syed Hussain	Conor Wileman
Trevor Johnson	Mike Worthington

Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee	
Charlotte Atkins	Kath Perry
Janet Eagland	Jeremy Pert
Phil Hewitt	Bernard Peters
Dave Jones	Carolyn Trowbridge
Alastair Little	Ross Ward
Johnny McMahon	Victoria Wilson
Paul Northcott	

Planning Committee	
Ben Adams	Alastair Little
David Brookes	Kath Perry
Ron Clarke	Kyle Robinsom
John Cooper	David Smith
Alan Dudson	Paul Snape
Keith James	Bob Spencer
Julia Jessel	Mike Worthington
Trevor Johnson	

Pensions Committee	
Ben Adams	Bob Spencer
Philip Atkins	Mike Sutherland
Derek Davis	Stephen Sweeney
Ann Edgeller	Martyn Tittley
Colin Greatorex	

Audit and Standards Committee	
David Brookes	Jeremy Oates
Mike Davies	Paul Northcott
Derek Davis	Martyn Tittley
Colin Greatorex	Carolyn Trowbridge
Michael Greatorex	Ross Ward
Jill Hood	Bernard Williams
Syed Hussain	Victoria Wilson
Ian Lawson	

Corporate Parenting Panel	
Gill Burnett	Jill Hood
Ron Clarke	Bryan Jones

Maureen Compton	Bernard Peters
Janet Eagland	Natasha Pullen
John Francis	Paul Snape
Michael Greatorex	Mark Sutton
Gill Heath	Carolyn Trowbridge
Phil Hewitt	

Charities and Trusts Committee	
Michael Greatorex	Kath Perry
Dave Jones	David Smith
Ian Lawson	

Cabinet Members (9)

Leader of the Council – Philip Atkins

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for
Health, Care and Wellbeing – Alan White

Cabinet Member for Finance – Mike Sutherland

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Mark Sutton

Cabinet Member for Economic Growth – Mark Winnington

Cabinet Member for Commercial – Mark Deaville

Cabinet Member for Communities – Gill Heath

Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability – Philip White

Cabinet Member for Highways – Helen Fisher

Support Member with specific portfolio (1)

Adult Safeguarding – Gill Burnett

Cabinet Support Members to chair and lead the All Party Member Groups (4)

Innovation – Keith Flunder

Improvement – Simon Tagg

Community – Mike Davies

External Relationships – Alastair Little

Community Cabinet Support Members (8) to support the Cabinet Member for Communities

Cannock Chase – Phil Hewitt

East Staffordshire – Bernard Peters

Lichfield – Janet Eagland

Newcastle-under-Lyme – Trevor Johnson

South Staffordshire – Victoria Wilson

Stafford – Jeremy Pert

Staffordshire Moorlands – Ross Ward

Tamworth – Jeremy Oates

10. Appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees and Panels

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

RESOLVED – That the under-mentioned be appointed as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committees stated for the period up to the annual Council meeting in 2019:-

Corporate Review Committee

Chairman

David Brookes

Vice-Chairman

Stephen Sweeney

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee

Chairman

Ian Parry

Vice-Chairman

Julia Jessel

Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee

Chairman

John Francis

Vice-Chairman

Conor Wileman

Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee

Chairman

Johnny McMahon

Vice-Chairman

Paul Northcott

Planning Committee

Chairman

David Smith

Vice-Chairman

Ben Adams

Pensions Committee

Chairman

Colin Greatorex

Vice-Chairman

Ann Edgeller

Audit and Standards Committee

Chairman

Martyn Tittley

Vice-Chairman

Carolyn Trowbridge

Corporate Parenting Panel

Chairman

Mark Sutton

Vice-Chairman

Bryan Jones

Charities and Trusts Committee

Chairman

Kath Perry

Vice-Chairman

David Smith

11. Appointment of members to Outside Bodies 2018/19

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

RESOLVED - That, subject to the reference to “Burnett, G” on pages 1 and 2 of the report being amended to read, “Jones, B” the nominations of the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Political Group Leaders, on the appointment of members to Outside Bodies for 2018/19 be approved and that the Leader be authorised to make any changes to those appointments as may become necessary.

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

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

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

In moving consideration of the report, Mr Sweeney indicated that the Authority had received notification that, due to some technical issues, the process for transferring the governance function of the Fire Authority to the Police and Crime Commissioner had been delayed in that the Statutory Instrument which would give effect to the change would not now be lodged in Parliament in time to allow the original date of the 1st June 2018 to be achieved.

In response to a question from Mr Francis as to who would scrutinise the Police and Crime Commissioner on fire service related issues, Mr Sweeney indicated that the details of the new regulations were still awaited.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

14. Questions

Mrs Trowbridge asked the following question of the Cabinet Support Member for Learning and Employability whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Would the Cabinet Support Member for Learning and Employability give me some reassurance that, now that Stafford Borough Council's planning department are considering the proposal for 1500 houses, the new primary school for Burleyfields, scheduled for phase 2 of the development, will be open in time for the extra children this development will bring?

Reply

The County Council continues to work closely with Stafford Borough Council to support delivery of the [adopted Plan for Stafford Borough](#).

One of three Strategic Development Location (SDL) in the town, the "West of Stafford" site is identified in Policy Stafford 3 (see pages 49 and 50 of the Plan).

Staffordshire's School Organisation Team are responsible for delivering the county council's statutory duty to secure sufficient school places and have identified the key requirements from the location, which includes:

a. "xviii. A new primary school will be provided, and financial contributions to support additional capacity with new provision at existing secondary schools" (see page 50 of the adopted Plan).

The master plan for the SDL has been developed jointly with developers and land owners and Burleyfields is part of the SDL, promoted by [Taylor Wimpey](#).

A new "2-FE" primary free school would eventually provide for up to 420 pupils, most likely opening in the mid-2020's.

Already there is a sealed Section 106 agreement in place that will contribute to the cost of the new school and, in time, further S106 agreements will be made for provision of the school site and additional education contributions.

The new primary school is shown on the list of potentially [25 new free schools across the county](#) to accommodate additional children as a result of new housing development.

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

Question

Which elements of the proposed agreement between the County Council and HS2 Ltd, and how much of the £10 million that has been accepted by the council, are specifically directed towards mitigating the significantly detrimental environmental and economic effects of constructing and operating the Stone Railhead?

Reply

The Council has not been offered or accepted £10 million from HS2 Ltd.

The County Council petitioned and raised a number of objections to the HS2 Phase 2a Hybrid Bill. The Staffordshire community impacted by the scheme help shape the petition points and 7 specific requests concerning the Stone Railhead were included.

The County Council has received a number of assurances and undertakings from HS2 Ltd in response to the petition but is waiting on a decision from the Select Committee regarding the extension of the tunnel between Whitmore and Madeley.

The assurances and undertakings are available to view on the HS2 Ltd website and include mitigation measures directly associated with the Stone Railhead which were in response to our petitioning points. These include:

- Ensuring that HS2 Ltd maximises the use of the facility thereby reducing road traffic across the Staffordshire road network.
- Ensuring that the slip roads to the M6 are constructed at an early stage to reduce construction traffic on Yarnfield Lane and surrounding roads.
- Minimising local disruption from operational noise by the use of appropriate noise mitigation features.
- Minimising visual impact by limiting the height of buildings on the site.
- Ensuring appropriate dust monitoring and control systems are in place.
- Minimising the footprint of the facility.

Mrs Atkins asked the following question of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

How many hours of free face to face advice a week do social workers based in Leek obtain for their clients from Leek Citizens Advice Bureau? Should Leek CAB close, to whom would they go for such advice?

Reply

We do not collect information about referrals to Citizens Advice in a way that makes it possible to aggregate data about the number of referrals or the number of hours of support provided. Information from the social care teams indicates that countywide they refer a couple of people a week to Citizens Advice, typically if they need support with benefits/housing or to manage debt. Citizen's Advice is funded through a combination of charitable and public sector contributions, including from the District and Borough Councils. I have not been informed that the Leek branch is due to close. Advice is available from their national website.

Supplementary Question

The visits to the Leek CAB from County Council staff have been frequent, particularly from the Family Intervention Team. I've asked the CAB to assess how many hours a week they are working on these cases and they have told me 20 to 25 hours per week. This is unsustainable given the current financial plight of the CAB. What will the County Council do alleviate these issues for Leek CAB and where will the County Council go if the CAB closes in the near future?

Reply

Much of what you have told me is new information to me. I will undertake to go away and discuss this matter with Mr Sutton.

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

Question

A year ago, this Council agreed unanimously to join the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge and Staffordshire County Council is now one of the 199 local authorities which have committed to promoting mental health in our communities and in our Council. Can the Leader please outline to Members what aspects of the Challenge have been met during this past year?

Reply

The County Council signed up to the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge in November 2017. We have appointed Councillor Ann Edgeller to be our Mental Health Champion. Ann has been as a strong advocate, striving to promote the importance of mental health amongst her peers and others in the community, and supporting commissioners to deliver better outcomes for our population. During the last six months we have been developing and implementing a range of strategies and plans to improve mental health:

- We continue to work to deliver the Suicide Prevention Strategy. This includes suicide prevention awareness training for GPs and primary care staff; a pilot project in a local school to introduce mental health training for staff; and working with Network Rail and others to develop an artwork project at Tamworth Train station which has seen a high number of incidents.
- A new Children and Adolescent Mental Wellbeing strategy is under development along with an application for the County Council to be a 'trailblazer site' in response to the recently published Green Paper (*Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision, 2017*). Being a Trailblazer site will provide us with the opportunity to have designated Senior Leads for mental health in schools, create Mental Health Support Teams and reduce waiting times for support. Successful trailblazer sites will commence in 2019 and will be supported by robust evaluation.
- A new Public Mental Health Plan is in development. This will include actions to influence the environments we live in and the communities that we share, to promote positive mental and emotional wellbeing. For example working with District and Borough Councils on their Health in all Policies approach to housing, delivering models of social prescribing via our local libraries and engaging with employers across the county to raise awareness about the importance of good mental health amongst their workforce.
- We have also developed a Mental Health Strategy for our own workforce, which includes Mental Health First Aid training across the organisation.

Supplementary Question

I am conscious of the fact that one of the resolutions was to nominate a member of staff as lead officer for mental health. Can you follow this through and ensure that we get a staff champion for mental health too?

Reply

I can confirm that there is a mental health champion on the staff side who has a large team behind him. I will make sure that I get their name to you.

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

Question

Does the County Council have any contingency plan to tackle holiday hunger?

Reply

I assume that you are referring to whether there are any plans to provide meals during the school holidays to those children who would normally be in receipt of free school meals. I am not aware of any plans to do so.

Supplementary Question

We are out of touch as a County Council. Across the UK there are as many as 3m children who face food deprivation during the school holidays this summer. Do we have any contingency plans during the six week summer holidays for children who would normally be receiving free school meals and to eradicate the problem of holiday hunger?

Reply

The County Council does not have plans in place to tackle this issue. That it not to say that there aren't other organisations throughout the County that are doing this. I would therefore suggest that you work with your local Cabinet Community Support Member to see what is available in your area.

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

Question

As an element of the mitigating arguments arising out of the petitioning process on Phase 2a can the portfolio holder give my constituents of Newcastle Rural information and assurances that, in light of the HS2 petition negotiations, the highways improvements such as the junctions of the A53 and A51 at the location of Blackbrook and the Swan with 2 Necks will be taking place in the near future before major work in the area commences?

Reply

The assurances and undertakings obtained by the Council in connection with the HS2 Phase 2a Hybrid Bill will become obligations on HS2 Ltd once the Bill receives Royal Assent.

With respect to the highway improvement at the junction of the A53 and A51 at Blackbrook mentioned above, HS2 Ltd are required to promote an 'additional provision' to ensure that they have the appropriate powers to provide the permanent highway improvement.

HS2 Ltd have indicated that, in line with works elsewhere along the route of the project, highway improvement work to facilitate construction traffic will be programmed at the commencement of main civil engineering works. It is not possible to provide a date for these works at this time.

Supplementary Question

Can you give me any idea of the timescales within which these improvements are likely to take place?

Reply

Phase 2 is still awaiting Royal Assent. Once we receive details of the timescales for the improvements we will ensure that local members receive the opportunity to get involved.

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

Question

The University of Chester Academy Trust is facing significant financial troubles - directly affecting pupils, parents and staff at University Academy Kidsgrove and University Primary Academy Kidsgrove. Does the Leader of the Council agree that the Regional Schools Commissioner's failure to give timely notification and information to this authority regarding this issue is a further disappointing example of the degradation of the role of this County Council and its councillors in education?

Reply

National education policy has been established for many years placing the management of schools in their own hands and moving towards more schools becoming academies.

With the increased autonomy for schools and a greater number of academies then, appropriately, the role of the local authority has changed. Recent LGA-commissioned research shows how local authorities have evolved as a champion for learners and families, a convenor of partnerships and a commissioner of services for schools.

The local authority retains key responsibilities for ensuring that every child has a school place and that the needs of vulnerable pupils are met, and for acting as champions for children and families.

Regional Schools Commissioners (RSC) are responsible for the oversight of academies and free schools and will intervene where there is underperformance or cause for concern. We had been made aware of the RSC's concerns regarding the schools' performance.

The county council has a positive but robust working relationship with the RSC and we meet regularly to discuss academies, trusts and also maintained schools. In between meetings, we are in regular contact and it is disappointing that the notification was late however fortunately, this is not indicative of the quality of our relationship with the RSC. The RSC has acknowledged this breakdown in communication, which occurred in the aftermath of the announcement, and agreed that we will discuss how procedures can be improved at our next joint meeting in June.

Supplementary Question

Does the Leader agree with me that the situation in Kidsgrove is probably more serious than it may seem? The Academy Trust is in great financial difficulty and 16 teachers and staff are being made redundant. Will the Leader and his Cabinet work

to ensure that officers of this Council will work alongside the Schools as, should the re-brokering of those schools fail, this could lead to the closure of those schools?

Reply

We will be raising this issue with Regional Schools Commissioner at our meeting next month. Although the County Council is responsible for the provision of school places, we do not run schools. The Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability will be taking an interest in this matter and will be keeping local members informed.

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

Question

There are a number of blocked drains in my division – some of the worst on the A34 Congleton Road and Hardingswood Road. These blocked drains were reported to the council well over two years ago and they have still not received any treatment. Please can I ask the Cabinet Support Member for Highways and Transport to intervene and urge prioritisation for these areas which have been prone to flooding in the past?

Reply

Our records show that routine gully emptying was carried out on the A34 Congleton Rd, Butt Lane in both 2016 and 2017. It is possible that some may have been missed, perhaps due to park cars, but those that were cleansed were all left running with no known problems. There are currently no customer reported problems with gullies along this section of the A34 and therefore no reactive tasks planned either. However, further routine cleansing will be carried out later this year as part of the annual cleansing programme.

With regard to Hardingswood Rd our records show one report of blocked gullies, made by Cllr. Robinson in February of this year. This location has a 3-year cleansing frequency and these blocked gullies will be attended to during 2018 as part of this programme.

Following a number of productivity improvements in the gully emptying operation the Countywide gully emptying schedules are currently being reviewed and will be updated and available on the Members Highways Portal later in the summer.

Supplementary Question

Do you have any further information as to the specific dates when the Hardingswood Road gullies will be attended to?

Reply

There are some traffic management implications at this location but the works will be carried out in early June.

15. Petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

Chairman