

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Staffordshire County Council's Community Engagement Framework

The County Council aims to give its communities a greater influence over local decision making and public sector delivery via more appropriate engagement activities. Currently the Council faces two significant issues in its community engagement work. Firstly, there is a lack of consistency in the way that services approach community engagement, with communities being engaged to varying standards. Secondly, a culture has developed whereby many services undertake community engagement in isolation which, in turn, has led to duplication.

The Cabinet has therefore approved a Community Engagement Framework which contains a set of common standards through which we can be sure that communities will get the same standard of engagement regardless of the service area.

In addition, the framework provides clear guidance to ensure we engage in a way that will contribute to the delivery of the county council's priorities and comply with national policy requirements. At the heart of this framework is the role of the elected member which is integral to the engagement process.

(Cabinet – 21 July 2010)

2. Staffordshire Compact Update incorporating the Third Sector Commissioning Standards

One of the key themes that now runs through County Council policy is the desire to support the essential work done in Staffordshire by community, voluntary and not for profit organisations ("the third sector"). The County Council, its public sector partners and the third sector have already agreed the Staffordshire Compact which sets out how we are going to work with each other. We are now looking to build on this by agreeing common commissioning standards which will apply to all future commissioning between the public sector in Staffordshire and the third sector. The Cabinet have therefore recently approved a set of standards that set out how we will work with each other in terms of:

- Analysing local need
- Planning a service to meet the need
- Finding a provider to deliver the service and
- Monitoring and evaluating the service against desired outcomes.

They will enable us to be even more effective when working together in future in designing innovative and effective services that are better matched to the needs of our local communities.

(Cabinet – 21 July 2010)

3. Joint First Quarter Performance and Budget Monitoring Report

The Cabinet has received the joint finance and performance report covering the first quarter of 2010/2011 which focuses on the delivery of the new Strategic Plan – “Staffordshire Unites 2010 – 2015” and the associated Medium Term Financial Strategy. Based on these three months it is predicted that the Council is on course for a budget overspend for the year of £9.177m (2.3%). The projected overspend has occurred in two specific areas, Children’s Services (£1.5m) and Social Care and Health (£8m)

The Cabinet has also considered the implications of the £7.9m cut in grants that the County Council receives from Central Government (as previously announced by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 10 June 2010) and has noted where reductions to existing budgets are proposed. This will have an impact upon the County Council and the services and outcomes that it is able to deliver.

(Cabinet – 21 July 2010)

4. Treasury Management Outturn Report for the Year ended 31 March 2010

The Cabinet has considered details of the Council’s investment and borrowing activity during 2009/10. As at the end of March 2010, the County Council’s overall level of borrowings - “its mortgage” – stood at £532.239 million and it had investments of £131.835 million.

In relation to borrowing, the Public Works Loan Board has revised its policy on early repayment penalties. As a consequence, it is more advantageous to repay longer term loans (with interest rates of between 4.50% and 5.00%) and raise replacement loans for a shorter duration and at lower cost. The Cabinet have therefore approved Debt Rescheduling to allow scope to repay all debt between 4.5% and 5% (up to £99 million) if the circumstances allow.

The Treasury Investment Strategy currently doesn’t explicitly allow investment in Treasury Bills and it would be beneficial to allow this to be added to the list of specified investments carried out in-house

RECOMMEND TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL - That an amendment to the Investment Strategy be approved to allow investment in UK Government Treasury Bills for up to 1 year maturity to be added to the list of in-house specified investments.

(Cabinet – 21 July 2010)

5. Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2011/16

The announcement by Central Government of a £7.9 million reduction in the County Council’s budget and the anticipated cuts in future spending undoubtedly impact upon the way in which we establish our priorities, set our budgets and decide upon which services are required to meet residents’

needs. In addition the County Council faces significant challenges in terms of increasing demands from our customers through the impact of external pressures such as demographic change and economic conditions.

It is important that we set a "good and balanced" budget". In order to do this we are proposing a savings target of 30% to be achieved within 3 years. This equates to £120 million. This is more ambitious than the Government's stated aim of cutting spending by 25% in all non-protected areas. This will give us some financial leeway to invest in priority areas.

The Cabinet have approved the framework for updating the Strategic Plan and development of the MTFs and have also requested the Innovation and Efficiency Board to work with services to identify appropriate plans to deliver savings of 30% by year 3 of the MTFs.

(Cabinet – 21 July 2010)

6. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

On 29 June 2010 the Secretaries of State for Business Innovation and Skills, and Communities and Local Government wrote to Local Authority and Business Leaders inviting them to work with the government to help strengthen local economies through the establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). LEPs will replace the existing Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and will have the responsibility of leading the economic regeneration of their area, and may also take over many of the roles and functions currently carried out by the RDA.

The County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council have submitted proposals for the formation of a LEP for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. This will be of a sufficient scale to secure resources and will fit within the proposed structure for other LEPs in the West Midlands, based on the agreed sub regions of Shropshire, Telford and Herefordshire, the Black Country, Worcestershire, Birmingham and Solihull and Coventry and Warwickshire.

The private sector have been consulted and are broadly in support of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire proposal, but recognise the need to work across boundaries with adjoining LEPs where this is required.

(Cabinet – 18 August 2010)

7. Home-to-school transport: Discretionary Denominational Transport Policy

Under the Council's discretionary transport policy, free transport is currently provided to pupils attending Catholic schools and St. Peter's CE Collegiate School where the child or their parent adheres to the religion or denomination of that particular school. This policy was seen to operate unfairly as parents who choose a non-faith school as an alternative to their catchment or closest school do not have the same entitlement to free transport. Accordingly, the

County Council has recently consulted interested parties on proposals to withdraw free denominational school transport in 2012.

Following the public consultation, the Cabinet have agreed changes to the original proposals so that:

(i) Those pupils who benefit from free travel under the Council's denominational transport policy as at July 2011 will continue to receive free travel whilst they remain at their then current primary or secondary school or until they move address.

(ii) Pupils starting at denominational primary and secondary schools in the 2011/2012 school year onwards will no longer be offered free travel to their school except for those who are statutorily entitled to free travel or where there are exceptional circumstances.

(Cabinet – 18 August 2010)

8. Consultation on the Provision of Magistrates and County Courts in Staffordshire

The Courts Service has consulted on proposals to change Magistrates and County Court arrangements in Staffordshire. Among other things, these proposals, if implemented, would result in the closure of the Magistrates and County Courts in Tamworth and the closure of the County Court in Burton. This raises significant concerns with regard to access by large numbers of Staffordshire residents to the civil and criminal justice systems. The Communities Scrutiny Committee have scrutinised the proposals in detail and their findings has assisted the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture in formulating the Council's response to the consultation.

(Cabinet – 18 August 2010)

9. Supporting the Staffordshire Economy – Staffordshire Business Support Fund

In October 2009, Cabinet approved the investment of £500,000 from County Council funds, matched with £500,000 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to create a loan fund to support small businesses in Staffordshire. In the first nine months, loans with a total value of £563,000 have been made to 21 businesses across Staffordshire. These businesses employ 166 people, and 70 of those jobs were considered to be at risk prior to loan finance being agreed. It is anticipated that the balance of the funding will have been lent to businesses within the next six months. The Cabinet have recently agreed to invest a further £500,000 in the Fund, to be matched by an additional £500,000 of ERDF monies, increasing the total finance available to Staffordshire businesses through the Staffordshire Business Support Fund to £2,000,000.

(Cabinet – 15 September 2010)

10. Staffordshire County Council – New Operating Model

A recent review of the Council's current ways of working has identified the need for improvements and changes, including structural, if the Authority is to continue to improve the quality of life for Staffordshire people whilst facing a period of significant financial challenge. The Cabinet have therefore approved proposals to transform the operating model of the County Council, based upon the following principles:

- Placing the County Council's customers and Staffordshire communities at the heart of our business
- Developing a "one council" model for dealing with our customers
- Improving customer knowledge and insight to identify the key outcomes and better inform the commissioning of services
- Streamlining decision making processes
- Organising the commissioning of services around the two key themes of "People" and "Place"
- Commissioning services from the most appropriate source whether that be internal teams, partner authorities, third sector organisations or the private sector.

The transformation of the organisation will obviously take some time but the sooner this happens the sooner the benefits will be felt by the people of Staffordshire.

(Cabinet – 15 September 2010)

11. Making a Difference – The Staffordshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy

One of the big issues facing this country, and facing us here in Staffordshire, is the fact that people are living longer. Unfortunately this extended lifespan does not always equate to an equivalent number of healthy years.

As a result of these demographic changes the social care and health systems are unsustainable in their current form. To address this, the Cabinet has agreed that the Council should change its approach to social care and health. The Staffordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy proposes a big shift towards the preventative agenda and sets out what needs to happen over the medium to long term. It also highlights some quick wins which will ensure that the new strategy starts to have an impact very quickly.

This is not the first time that the County Council have agreed a Health Strategy. But this one is different in at least one key respect. This time the level of support for this strategy across the whole of the public sector in Staffordshire is truly unprecedented. All our partners are solidly behind this strategy, are signed up to the priorities, and are committed to working together to deliver the outcomes.

(Cabinet – 15 September 2010)

12. Business Case for Setting up a Trading Company

From time to time opportunities arise for the Council to sell its services to bodies outside the public sector but it is prevented from taking advantage of these opportunities by virtue of its legal status as a local authority. In order to avoid this limitation the Cabinet have agreed that the Council should set up a trading company as a vehicle through which it sells its services. The Council already operates several large successful trading services such as County Fleet Care, Print Commissioning, Catering, Cleaning and Grounds Services, who primarily provide services to the authority and schools but who have won a variety of contracts by tender for Staffordshire Police, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue, Borough/District Councils, Primary Care Trusts, etc. It is not known as yet how extensive the use of such a company might be, but it would open up avenues that have so far been closed to the Council.

(Cabinet – 15 September 2010)

13. Portfolio Holder Delegated Decisions

Portfolio holders have recently taken decisions in respect of the following matters:

- .Fixing the level of Foreign Exchange Rate to be applied to the W2R contract with Veolia ES Aurora Limited.
- The settlement to be paid to two adjacent landowners in respect of proposed improvements to the junction of the A5 and Vicarage Road, Gailey.
- The publication of proposals under Section 28(1) of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 to:
 - (i) Remove the pre-reception (nursery) places at Western Springs Community Primary School, Rugeley from maintained provision from 31 August 2011.
 - (ii) Lower the age limit at Henry Chadwick Community Primary School, Hill Ridware to create a Foundation Stage Class from January 2011.
 - (iii) Remove the pre-reception (nursery) places at Manor Hill First School, Stone from maintained provision from 31 August 2011.
- Entering into a 25 year lease of 544 square meters of land on the site of Rocester Village Hall to enable the County Council to construct and operate a children's centre.
- The sale of 3.08 acres of land at the former Castle Park Infants School, Burton upon Trent.

- Passing a resolution to allow non-teaching staff at schools obtaining Foundation or Trust status to have/retain membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

14. Forward Plan

The Cabinet have approved the Forward Plan for the period 1 October 2010 to 31 January 2011, which contains details of the decisions which the Cabinet are expected to take during that period.

15. Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Our Local Enterprise Partnership submitted its bid to Whitehall on 6 September following widespread consultation with the public and business sectors across the county. The bid identifies Staffordshire, including Stoke, as the relevant geographical area for the partnership. We are awaiting feedback from the offices of Eric Pickles and Vince Cable on this initial proposal.

16. Staffordshire Strategic Partnership

On 22 September I hosted the Staffordshire Hundred partnership event at Shugborough Hall. Many Staffordshire organisations attended, including those from the worlds of business, social housing and GPs. The event outlined the future vision for the partnership and explained which cross cutting priorities we would be concentrating delivery upon over the coming years. Those who attended heard an inspiring speech from David Moorcroft around ambition, vision and team work.

Our job now is to make sure that the countywide strategic partnership focuses on delivery rather than bureaucracy and governance. We will be stream lining our partnership arrangements both at a county and at a local level to make sure that we deliver exactly what is required to improve the quality of life for Staffordshire people and Staffordshire communities.

17. National government proposals for changes to the health service

The proposals in the white paper "Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS" and the associated consultation documents are part of the government's emphasis on localism, which it defines as "pushing power away from Whitehall out to those who know best what will work in their communities". The proposals are also intended to strengthen the role of patients and the public in shaping health services as well as supporting the increased integration between health, social care and other council responsibilities such as housing.

The "Local Democratic Legitimacy in Health" consultation proposes that:

- **Local authorities take on local public health improvement functions** - This would involve local authorities leading joint strategic needs assessments (JSNA) across health and local government whilst

promoting joint commissioning between GP consortia and local councils. Staffordshire County Council has, for some years, played a key role in producing the county JSNAs by working closely with the Directors of Public Health and the Staffordshire Observatory to achieve a shared evidence base to inform priority setting and business planning. The Staffordshire Joint Commissioning Unit has successfully worked across health and social care boundaries to deliver integrated services and work is now underway to build close links with the GP consortia located across the county.

It is also proposed that the responsibility and funding for health improvement activity will transfer to local authorities from 2012. This includes the prevention of ill health by addressing life style factors such as smoking, alcohol, diet and physical exercise. Local Directors of Public Health will be jointly appointed by local authorities and the national Public Health Service and employed by local authorities. In truth, this approach builds on the solid foundations we have already seen in Staffordshire. The county council has taken an active role in leading the public health agenda over the last 16 months with our work in helping to develop a new public health strategy and our commitment to tackle alcohol abuse as a cross cutting priority. The Director of Public Health is already a joint appointment and sits on the Senior Leadership Team of the county council.

- **There is a lead role for local authorities in promoting integration –** This includes the extension of personal budgets in the NHS and social care, with joint assessment and care planning. The consultation suggests that statutory partnership boards, described as “health and wellbeing boards” be set up to co-ordinate joint working. They would also lead the JSNA, support joint commissioning and undertake a scrutiny role in relation to major service redesign. There would be provision for the involvement of different tiers of local government and for cross-authority collaboration. The board would have a lead role in determining the strategy and allocation of any local place based health budgets. Its members would include the Leader of the local authority, representatives of social care, NHS commissioners, patient champions, including a representative of “HealthWatch” (see below) and Directors of Public Health. We would need to ensure that the new board operated strategically and exerted the necessary influence rather than developing as a “talking shop” with the real decisions being taken elsewhere.

It is proposed that the current statutory functions of health overview and scrutiny committees would transfer to this board, which would be tasked with ensuring that local disputes about health services were only referred on in the most exceptional circumstances. The consultation suggests that a separate formal health scrutiny function would remain within the local authority to scrutinise the work of the new board but without the current statutory powers. There is the potential for confusion of roles between the new board and our health scrutiny

committee and the possibility of duplication of effort. If this model is adopted, we will need to manage this closely.

- **Local Involvement Networks are reconstituted into “Local HealthWatch” organisations, acting as independent consumer champions, accountable to local authorities** - The new local “HealthWatch” organisations will act as local consumer champions across health and social care. They will have responsibilities and funding for supporting individuals, for example, in choosing a GP and for NHS complaints advocacy services. This approach builds on our current arrangements with Local Involvement Networks as local authorities would continue to fund “HealthWatch” and contract for their services. It provides an opportunity for us to reflect on how the Local Involvement Networks have operated and to make proposals to ensure the greater effectiveness of the new organisations. The Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health has been involved in national discussions concerning the details and practicalities of establishing these bodies.

We welcome the greater recognition of local authorities' roles in tackling the social and economic determinants of health. It is an acknowledgement of the need to “upstream” investment in public health and the prevention of ill health as a way, not only of improving the health of Staffordshire people and reducing inequalities across the county, but also of reducing the cost ultimately of health treatment services. However, it is hoped that with the transfer of responsibility comes the appropriate transfer of resources, as public health is an enormous area of work, impacted on by almost every local authority function. The public health white paper, due later this year, will clarify exactly how much discretion councils will actually have to carry out the new public health function.

18. JCB Academy, Rocester

Over the August bank Holiday weekend, I was pleased to accept an invitation to have a preview of the transformation of the Arkwright and Tudor Mill in Rocester into the JCB Academy. The renovation of the mill is absolutely stunning and the education facilities on offer are first class. The Academy opened its doors to its first students in September who eventually will progress to meet the growing need for engineering and manufacturing skills.

19. Raising the profile of Staffordshire

Over the last few weeks I have been out and about raising the profile of the county. I have attended a number of Question Time events including a BBC “State of the Region” debate on the spending review, and a more local event, organised by REFORM, held at Cannock.

I am now a member of the Executive of the Local Government Group of the Local Government Association. I will be representing Staffordshire and the West Midlands region in my capacity as Chairman of the West Midlands

LEADER'S STATEMENT

Councils. I also sit on the Economic and Transport Board which develops strategic policy around these issues. This role will enable me to champion to a national audience the excellent work we deliver in Staffordshire and also learn from others.

P.E.B. Atkins
Leader of the Council