

## Statement of the Leader of the Council

### 1. Strategic Plan and Financial Planning 2019-2024

At their meeting on 18 July 2018 the Cabinet considered the progress being made in the development of the financial planning for the council for the period 2019-24. In February 2018, a budget gap in the order of £35m for each of the years of the Strategic Plan period was reported to Council. There is no single answer to addressing this gap and therefore the developing Strategic Plan proposes the following six strands of activity which together set out the approach to balancing the financial plans over the medium term:



**Creating the right conditions for our economy to grow will increase Business Rates income**

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**As we encourage housebuilding to meet growing demand, more homes will generate more Council Tax**

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**Lobbying Government to secure greater funding and responsibility to act on the issues that matter most to Staffordshire people**

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**Changing the way we use technology and data combined with closer working with communities, in a new offer to Staffordshire citizens**

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**Using council assets such as land, buildings or money held in reserve to generate income**

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**Continuing to reduce costs by finding new and more efficient ways of working, for instance through greater use of technology**

It was noted that the aims of growing the economy and building more homes will take a number of years to realise any financial benefit to the council. Therefore, the council must plan to reduce its cost base now in order to balance the budget for the immediate term while the longer-term initiatives are developed.

At their meeting on 19 September 2018 the Cabinet considered the draft budget proposals for 2019/20. Taking into account the savings options previously identified, the forecast shows that there is expected to be a balanced position from the third year (2021/22). However, a gap still remains in the first two years. The Cabinet have therefore given their approval to the making of a range of additional savings.

(Note by Clerk: The decision of the Cabinet at their meeting on 19 September 2018 was called-in by Members and the reasons for the call-in are to be considered by the Corporate Review Committee at their meeting on 4 October 2018).

*(Cabinet – 18 July and 19 September 2018)*

## **2. Treasury Management Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2018**

The Cabinet have received a summary of the County Council's Treasury Management activities for the year ended 31 March 2018. The report summarised the borrowing and investment decisions taken throughout the year in the light of the interest rates and economic conditions prevailing at the time.

Overall the report showed that the Council's borrowing and investment activities were being undertaken prudently and sensibly. The Cabinet have also noted that the Council's Annual Investment Strategy is considered prudent and sufficiently robust to meet any market challenges created by the UK's decision to leave the European Union and that Officers will continue to monitor the position.

*(Cabinet – 18 July 2018)*

## **3. Future Model of Libraries Service**

Public consultation on the proposals for the future model of library services in Staffordshire took place between 8 January and 1 April 2018. In total 3,666 individuals, organisations and stakeholders shared their views as part of the consultation.

The Cabinet have considered the outcomes from the consultation and have approved proposals to further develop the libraries service supported by volunteers and technology, together with expanding the existing community focused model to other libraries to realise further MTFS savings.

Under these proposals the following will be offered - a further 4 libraries for community management (Cheadle, Clayton, Eccleshall and Penkridge); pilot self-service at up to two libraries (Stafford and Penkridge); and initially reducing the opening hours at Cheslyn Hay Library to 10 hours per week while continuing to seek a community partner to manage and deliver this library.

The Cabinet have also approved proposals to withdraw the larger Travelling Library vehicle at the end of March 2019 and deliver the service via the two smaller mobile libraries which are more flexible and therefore able to access more isolated or rural communities from April 2019.

*(Cabinet – 18 July 2018)*

#### **4. Enlargement of Holy Trinity CE (C) Primary School, Burton-upon-Trent**

The Cabinet have approved the publication of a formal statutory proposal to increase the capacity at Holy Trinity CE (C) Primary School to enable the school to accommodate additional children generated from a new housing development planned in the catchment area of the school.

The proposals, if approved, will enlarge the school's capacity from 140 to 210 places and enable the Published Admission Number (PAN) to increase from 20 to 30 places. The School's Governors and the diocese are in full support of the proposals.

*(Cabinet – 18 July 2018)*

#### **5. First Quarter Integrated Performance Report**

The Cabinet have received an overview of the county council's performance and financial position in delivering against the Strategic plan and Delivery Plan. They noted that, at the end of Quarter 1, the overall assessment on the council's performance and financial position is Amber. Whilst this assessment is expected at this stage in the financial year, it will be vital that the council closely monitors both delivery and the financial position to identify and address any emerging issues during 2018/19.

The latest revenue forecast outturn shows an overspend of £3.2m (0.6%), compared to the balanced position at the time of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The pressures relate to an increase in medical assessment costs (£0.1m), increase in costs of new Care Home placements (£2.2m) and pressures due to additional Looked After Children (£2.3m).

With regard to Looked After Children, an assessment of social worker caseload levels has highlighted that there is an urgent need to reduce these to keep the service safe and to align with national caseload levels. The Cabinet have therefore approved the use of £2.160 million of Contingency to support Children's Services.

*(Cabinet – 18 July 2018)*

#### **6. Greenwood House, Burntwood**

The Cabinet have approved proposals for the County Council to enter into legal agreements with health partners to design and build a new health centre on land owned by the council known locally as Greenwood House, Burntwood. The works will be funded by an NHS England grant once their Due Diligence process has confirmed value for money. As part of the development the council will consider funding the construction of an adjoining pharmacy on a commercial basis to improve the patient experience by creating a "one-stop shop" for primary care needs.

*(Cabinet – 18 July 2018)*

## **7. Stafford History Centre**

We had some very disappointing news at the start of the month, when we heard from the Heritage Lottery Fund that our Round 2 funding application for the Staffordshire History Centre project was unfortunately unsuccessful.

The quality of the consultation which we had completed for the project and the range of activities which took place during the development phase, was recognised by HLF, but as you can imagine the competition for a diminishing funding pot is always going to be extremely fierce.

I would like to thank everyone involved in putting together and supporting the bid for their hard work and I know this will be a bitter blow for them.

Of course, this isn't quite the end of the story as the Project Board and Team are looking at alternative proposals which will allow delivery of some aspects of the project and will update Cabinet in due course.

## **8. John Taylor Free School**

On a more positive note, I joined colleagues and partners for the official opening of the John Taylor Free School by His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester.

As you know, the school in Tatenhill is Staffordshire's first brand new high school for over 25 years and it was fantastic to see the pupils enjoying such an amazing amenity.

The school will eventually accommodate 1,550 pupils including 6th form, and is part of our wider plans to add around 7,900 primary and secondary school places over the next five years, at an estimated cost of £151 million.

## **9. Mill Green**

Also taking a step closer to opening its doors is the Mill Green outlet village near Cannock.

Work on the vital infrastructure improvements is due to start in November and once open up to 1,200 jobs could be created at the outlet village, which will contain 100 shops over 26,500 sq m.

This will undoubtedly be a fantastic addition to Staffordshire and together with our partner Amey we will be working hard to minimise disruption and congestion while the work takes place.

## **10. A50 Improvements**

This month also marked another highways milestone with the successful demolition of a bridge over the A50.

This required the complete closure of the A50 between the A521 roundabout at Blythe Bridge and the B5030 roundabout at Uttoxeter for two nights, to allow the demolition of the 'old' bridge across the A50.

The work finished a few hours early than expected and in plenty of time to allow morning commuters to make their journeys.

We are very much on the home stretch now and once complete the scheme will help support the creation of new homes and jobs, cut congestion and improve road safety.

## **11. European Regional Development Fund Allocation (ERDF)**

There has been some good news from Europe in terms of the ERDF as, although the current Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP's European Structural and Investment Funds programme is in its final stages, readjustment in the ERDF Euro/Sterling exchange rate means there is still a significant ERDF allocation to be committed.

We will have to act swiftly, but this is a great opportunity for the LEP to commit all of its remaining ERDF allocation to projects and programmes that support economic growth priorities.

## **12. CQC Local System Review of Health and Social Care**

This month will see the county council and NHS partners in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire take part in a review by the Care Quality Commission to see how well people are managed by our health and social care system.

We all know that the local health economy situation is a complex and challenging one, but we are making progress and this is an opportunity to look at what works well and what improvements we could make.

## **13. Winter**

It doesn't seem that long ago that we were talking about heatwaves and water shortages, but I am afraid next Monday marks the official start of winter for the county council.

The salt is piled and the gritters have been put through their paces, so they are ready to roll when need be.

Our crews always do a fantastic job and with another very cold winter potentially on the cards from November, I know they will be doing everything they can to help keep the county safely on the move.

Turning to health, we will be working with NHS partner to help ease the winter pressures by helping encourage more people to stay well and be treated in their homes and communities rather than acute hospitals where possible.

Public Health England has also launched its winter campaign to encourage as many people as possible who are eligible for the flu jab or spray to do so, something which we would echo.

#### **14. MindKind**

Finally, with good mental health being as important as good physical health as a county council we very much want to lead by example on this issue.

That is why we have launched a new MindKind initiative where staff will be trained as Mental Health First Aiders. We have already had a tremendous response to this with over 70 colleagues stepping forward to take part.