

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 23 July 2020

Attendance

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

Apologies for absence: Maureen Compton, Ann Edgeller and Trevor Johnson

Also in attendance -

PART ONE

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

Mr Snape moved, and Mr David Williams seconded, and it was:

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

2. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

The following Members declared an interest in accordance with Standing Order 16.5:-

Member	Minute Nos.	Interest	Reason
Martyn Tittley	7	Disclosable Pecuniary	Undertakes work for a Utility company

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 19 March 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 19 March 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

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

Mrs Perry moved, and Mrs Jessel seconded, and it was:-

RESOLVED – That Mr Paul Snape be appointed Vice-Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year.

5. Chairman's Correspondence

Death of Former County Councillor Ignatius Kelly

The Chairman informed the Council of the death, on 23 March 2020, of former County Councillor Ignatius Kelly. Mr Kelly represented the former Wombourne County Electoral Division (South Staffordshire) between 1989 and 2001. He had served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Education Committee, Enterprise and Economic Development Committee, the Fire and Public Protection Committee, the Planning Committee and the Social Services Committee.

Death of Mick Harrison MBE, Commissioner for Safety

Members were also informed of the death, on 2 April 2020, of Mick Harrison, the Council's Assistant Director for Children's System Transformation within the Families and Communities Directorate.

Mick had worked for the County Council for nearly nine years in leadership roles but was well known to many through his illustrious career with Staffordshire Police where he served both across the county and the city of Stoke-on-Trent. His contribution to public services was later recognised by Her Majesty the Queen in the New Year's Honours list in 2012, where he received an MBE.

Members paid tribute to Mr Kelly and Mr Harrison following which they observed a one minute silence in their memory.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The Chairman made the following statement:

"These are, as we are all aware, unprecedented and difficult times.

I would like to express, on behalf of this Council, our immense sadness at the deaths suffered during this current pandemic. Our most sincere and heartfelt condolences are sent to all those in our communities who have unfortunately lost love ones, we are thinking of you all and understand the grief you have gone through and are going through.

I would also like to say that our thoughts and prayers are with those of you, or your family and friends, who are suffering from the virus at this moment, and our thanks are with all those involved in your own or your loved one's treatment.

While many people are following government guidance and staying at home, this is not an option for frontline and key workers, you continue to care for and provide support to everyone within our communities who need you, in the most incredibly challenging circumstances. We have all been humbled and astounded at the total selflessness and devotion of our frontline and key workers, in whatever their capacity, they have given so much in the fight against coronavirus. An unreserved thank to each and every member of our frontline and key workers.

Throughout this amazing county there are also many in our communities who are volunteering to work daily to ensure support is given to our elderly and vulnerable residents, making sure everyone has food on their tables, and that vital supplies are delivered to individuals and organisations. Supporting the vulnerable at this time can also be simply going to the shops for a neighbour.

I have heard of some astonishing examples of work being undertaken in the communities throughout the county and I want you to know that I really appreciate all of your efforts. I would personally like to thank you all for going the extra mile during this difficult time.

I stand ready to play a full part in the recovery within this county, as and when our communities can seek to come to terms with all that has happened in recent weeks. The authority will be looking at ways to remember everyone's efforts once the battle with the virus is won and we can come together again."

6. Urgent Additional Item - Appointment of the Leader of the Council

Note by Clerk: On the motion of the Chairman, the Council agreed that this item be dealt with as urgent business as Mr Atkins OBE had given notice of his intention to stand down from his position as Leader of the Council.

Members paid tribute to Mr Atkins for the contribution he had made to the work of the Authority during his eleven years as Leader of the Council. In response, Mr Atkins thanked Members for their kind words and highlighted some of the challenges the Council had faced and its achievements whilst under his leadership. He also extended his thanks to his fellow Members and to the Council's officers for their support.

Mr Atkins moved, and Mr Philip White seconded, that Mr Alan White be appointed as Leader of the Council.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED – That Mr Alan White be appointed as Leader of the Council.

7. Statement of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining the work of the Cabinet since the previous meeting of the Council. In moving consideration of the report, Mr Alan White made the following statement:

Covid-19 in Burton

“Since lockdown eased on 4 July there has been an increase in Covid-19 cases in East Staffordshire. There have been 58 positive cases in the district, almost all in Burton, of which 45 cases are in the areas of Anglesey, Horninglow and Shobnall. The County Council is working with East Staffordshire Borough Council, partners and most importantly the local community. We held our second virtual meeting yesterday afternoon to discuss how we spread the message, protect local people and avoid the restrictions we have seen for example in Leicester and Blackburn. This is about acting early to reduce the spread of infection. There are currently no plans for lockdown measures in Burton or anywhere in Staffordshire, however more robust localised measures will be considered if necessary.

Burton Covid-19 Rates and Cases:

- The current (15th-21st July) 7-day rate per 100,000 population is 21.8 in Burton-upon-Trent
- Current 7-day rate per 100,000 is 39.4 in Anglesey, Shobnall and Horninglow
- Current 7-day rate per 100,000 is 13.4 in East Staffordshire.
- For comparison, the current 7-day rate per 100,000 is 3.9 for Staffordshire and 5.3 for England.

In response, we are promoting public health messages through the media, social media, letters to homes and via word of mouth to prevent further spread of the infection. Information is available in different languages. We are analysing data every day and working with Public Health England (PHE) to investigate cases and their contacts to ensure isolation and testing messages are promoted. East Staffordshire Borough Council are visiting shops and businesses in the local area to reinforce messages. And we have set up three different testing facilities – a drive through at the Pirelli stadium, a walk-in centre at Uxbridge Road Mosque and an NHS team who can test people in their own homes.

We are acting now to contain the spread and are calling on all people to follow the guidance on Covid-19. Now is not the time to let our guard down and we are already seeing an amazing response from the community in Burton. Our message is that Covid-19 doesn't care about culture, faith, or background so sticking to the rules and booking a test if you have symptoms is the best way to help protect yourself, your family and your community.”

Keeping Staffordshire Moving - Highway Permit Scheme

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Note by Clerk: Mr Tittley declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in this item and left the meeting during its consideration.

Staffordshire Autism Joint Implementation Plan 2020-2023

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mrs Woodward concerning what the County Council and Clinical Commissioning Groups will do to increase capacity to be able to get Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in place more quickly, Mr Price indicated that the County Council was doing a substantial amount of work behind the scenes on EHCPs and would welcome the opportunity to have a conversation about this with Mrs Woodward after the meeting.

The County Council's Response to COVID-19

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins enquired as to the future sustainability of the care market in Staffordshire given the impact of Covid-19. In response, Mr Alan White stated that this was a concern; that the County Council was providing support to the sector; and that the situation would be closely monitored going forward.

Mr Robinson extended his thanks to all local government workers for their excellent work in keeping services in Staffordshire running, where this has been possible, during the current pandemic. He also enquired about the Government's free laptop scheme and the forecasted need in Staffordshire verses the actual allocation. In response, Mr Philip White indicated that, in Staffordshire, 1694 laptops were provided by Central Government (which was in excess of the requests which had been received from schools) and over 300 wi-fi dongles were handed out to learners who did not have access to broadband. He also undertook to confirm the detail in writing to Mr Robinson following the meeting.

Members spoke about how local community groups, parish councils and volunteers had responded to the pandemic and the valuable contribution they had made during "lockdown". They also praised "key workers" for their commitment and hard work, often under difficult circumstances.

Several Members highlighted the positive impact the Council's Covid-19 Support Fund had had in supporting local community/voluntary groups and other organisations across Staffordshire and how, in some cases, a small grant had had a big impact.

In response to a question from Mrs Woodward about the Government's announcement of a fund aimed at providing food and basic essentials for people during the Covid crisis, Mr Sutton indicated that Staffordshire had been awarded approximately £800,000, £600,000 of which would be distributed to the eight family hubs, £120,000 would go towards warehousing costs and the replacement of perishable goods and £100,000 was to be allocated for on-going food costs for district and borough councils. Mr Sutton also paid tribute to staff in the County Council and in partner organisations for the support

they had given to families and communities including, for example, schools and early years providers who had stayed open in order to care for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Mr Alan White concluded by reminding Members that Covid-19 was still impacting communities, that it had not gone away and that was vital that people continued to follow the relevant protocols.

Staffordshire County Council's iCare Campaign

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward referred to the number of people who had volunteered under the Council's iCare Campaign and the fact that it was good that more people had volunteered than had actually needed to be deployed. She enquired as to, now that some of those volunteers would have returned to their day jobs, how many volunteers were still on the books should they need to be deployed if there was a second spike in Staffordshire. In response, Mr Alan White indicated that he did not have the relevant information to hand and would therefore respond to Mrs Woodward following the meeting.

Schools Capital Programme 2020-21

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins enquired as to whether the County Council was in receipt of the Government's Capital Grant Allocation to Schools. In response, Mr Price indicated that the Council was still awaiting confirmation of the allocation and that he would write to Mrs Atkins as soon as this had been received. He added that it was understood that an additional £1m of funding would be allocated for this area.

Mr Brookes referred to the poor physical condition of some of the schools in his division and also the need for capital investment at Thomas Alleyne's High School in Uttoxeter which had 36 separate buildings.

Mr Pert referred to changes in the job market, the need for people to retain or reskill and the important role to be played by schools and colleges across the county.

Highways and Transport Capital Programme 2020/21

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Mr Brookes expressed his thanks to the Cabinet for their approval to the funding of approximately £370,000 of highway works in Uttoxeter which would improve traffic flows and pedestrian safety in the town. He did however indicate that there remained issues still to be addressed including the delay in replacing the bollard at the top of High Street, Uttoxeter on ongoing problems with blocked gullies.

Mrs Eagland referred to problems in her division caused by HGVs parking overnight along residential roads.

Executive Responses to All Party Working Groups Recommendations on Isolation and Aspiration

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins enquired as to whether the All Party Working Groups had a future and, if they were to continue, would their terms of reference be discussed with the opposition. She also asked about what role the Council's Select Committees would have in scrutinising and monitoring the action plans which had come out of the last two groups. In response, Mr Alan White confirmed that the All Party Working Groups were to continue and that Members would be invited to join the Groups. He added that he would have a conversation with officers as to how the Council's Select Committees would scrutinise the outcomes from the Groups.

Mr Robinson indicated that the Coronavirus pandemic had certainly helped to identify those individuals who were socially isolated and that community groups would now have more knowledge about those people than they have ever had before. He expressed the hope that those people would continue to receive support going forward.

Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Mr Deaville expressed his thanks to the Council's Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team in taking the lead in procuring sufficient PPE to last for 12 weeks.

Economic Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Mrs Woodward welcomed the proposed extensions to the Cannock Chase and Silverdale Enterprise Centres and enquired as to the review of vacancy rates at other Enterprise Centres, particularly those which were located in her Division. In response Mr Philip White indicated that the usage of all the Council's enterprise centres was kept under review and that he would be happy to speak to Mrs Woodward about those located within her Division.

Mr Robinson enquired as to whether the County Council would commit to amending its procurement practices to ensure that local supplies and businesses had more opportunities to bid for contracts which would lead to more money being spent locally in Staffordshire. In response, Mr Alan White indicated that the Council's procurement practices were laid out in the Constitution and were reviewed regularly by the Audit and Standards Committee.

Local Outbreak Control Plan

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

Mr Tagg commended the Local Outbreak Control Plan and the work of the Outbreak Control Boards. Mr Clarke expressed his thanks to the County Council for its support in responding to the recent Covid-19 outbreak in Burton upon Trent.

Mrs Jessel and Mr McMahon reminded Members that it was as important as ever that people took personal responsibility, stuck to the rules, washed their hands regularly, followed the latest advice on social distancing and co-operated with the test and trace service. Mr Alan White added that he would ask Members to continue to reinforce this message in their local communities.

Mrs Hood expressed her disappointment that some people going to public houses were failing to comply with the Government guidance on social distancing. She also praised the work of Stafford Borough Council's Environmental Health Team.

Economic Recovery

(Paragraph 16 of the Statement)

Mrs Atkins indicated that she welcomed the comments the Leader of the Council had made about measures to support local businesses and echoed the views which had previously been made by Mr Robinson concerning ensuring that local supplies and businesses had more opportunities to bid for County Council contracts.

Mr Oates referred to the loss of big brands such as John Lewis in Tamworth and the impact this would have on the town and on Staffordshire. He, together with Mr Parry, referred to the challenges to the High Street as a result of internet shopping and the need for people to retrain or upskill in order to be able to compete for the better paid jobs.

Mrs Woodward enquired as to how the message was getting through to small businesses about the support available to them.

Mr Robinson referred to the potential job opportunities in the low carbon and renewable energy economy and the need for the County Council to ensure that Staffordshire residents were equipped with the necessary skills to be able to take advantage of those opportunities. Mrs Jessel added that she shared Mr Robinson's views about the opportunities in the low carbon and renewable energy economy and that the County Council was continuing to work with business leaders, our universities and other public sector partners to grow Staffordshire's economy and create more, better paid jobs.

Mr Francis spoke about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector in Staffordshire and the downturn in manufacturing including the recent announcement of job losses at JCB.

Mr Philip White thanked Members for their comments. He added that Staffordshire had enjoyed low unemployment levels for a number of years and that the County Council had been working hard to attract more, better paid jobs to Staffordshire. Mr White also referred to the role of the Council in supporting Colleges and Universities to ensure that students were equipped with the necessary skills to enable them to compete for those new jobs; supporting local business; and attracting more businesses into the County.

RESOLVED – That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received.

8. Recommendations to the Council

The Council were informed that as a result of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the Government had introduced legislation, The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No.392 ('the Regulations') which enabled local authorities to hold "virtual" meetings.

As a consequence of these Regulations it was necessary to make changes to the Council's Procedural Standing Orders.

RESOLVED – That the amendments to the Council's Procedural Standing Orders to facilitate "virtual" meetings, as detailed in the appendix to the report, be approved.

9. Access to Information Rules - Special Urgency Notices

The Council noted that, in accordance with the Access to Information Rules contained within the County Council's Constitution, the Leader of the Council is required to submit quarterly reports to the Council detailing those key decisions taken by the Cabinet where it had not been possible to give the requisite 28 days public notice of the intention to take such a decision. Similarly, where a decision being taken by or on behalf of the Cabinet is urgent and any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public's interests or the interests of any person(s) to whom the decision relates, then the Leader of the Council may seek the approval of the Chairman of the Corporate Review Committee to that decision being exempt from call-in. A report on the use of this procedure must be submitted to Council on a quarterly basis.

Members were informed that the Cabinet, at their meeting on 15 April 2020, took a key decision relating to the provision of a fee uplift and financial stability measures for Care Providers during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the Cabinet, at their meeting on 20 May 2020, also took a key decision on further extra funding of £4.3m from the additional grant to support care providers. As it had not been possible to give the requisite 28 days public notice of the intention to take the above-mentioned decisions, the provisions referred to above were utilised. In addition, as there was considerable concern nationally about the risk of care providers failing, which would have a catastrophic impact on people and the NHS, the approval of the Chairman of the Corporate Review Committee was sought to the decisions being exempt from call-in.

RESOLVED – That the use of the special urgency and exemption from call-in provisions contained in the Council's Constitution in respect of the Cabinet's decisions on 15 April 2020 (on the provision of a fee uplift and financial stability measures for Care Providers during the Covid-19 pandemic) and 20 May 2020 (on further extra funding of £4.3m to support care providers), be noted.

10. Annual Scrutiny Report 2019/20

Members considered the Annual Scrutiny Report which summarised the work the Council's Select Committees had undertaken during 2019/20.

Mr David Williams extended his thanks to all those Members who sat on the Council's Select/Scrutiny Committees and also to the officers who supported them.

In commending the report, Mrs Atkins and Mrs Woodward referred to the valuable role played by scrutiny in holding the Council's executive to account. In response, Mr Alan White reaffirmed the commitment of the Council's Executive to the work of scrutiny and positive impact it has on shaping decision making.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

11. Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2019-20

Mr Sutton moved consideration of the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2019-20. He extended his thanks to Members of the Panel, and the officers who supported them, for the valuable contribution they had made. He also extended his thanks to those Members and Officers who had offered to be a mentor to a child in care and he reminded Members that they were all Corporate Parents.

Mr Philip White referred to the work of the virtual school for the support it provided to children in care.

Mr Philip Atkins also spoke about the role of the County Council in trying to prevent children from needing to enter into the care system.

Mr Bryan Jones commended the work of the Panel and how it engaged with those young people in the Council's care.

RESOLVED – That the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2019-20 be received.

12. Committee Membership

The Council noted that the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Group Leaders, would notify Members of any changes to Committee memberships in the coming days.

13. Appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees and Panels (Including the appointment of Community Cabinet Support Members)

Mr Alan White moved, and Mr Philip White seconded, the nominations for the appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committee.

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 2021:-

Corporate Review Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Opposition Vice-Chairman

Colin Greatorex
Conor Wileman
Susan Woodward

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Opposition Vice-Chairman

Ian Parry
Tina Clements
Kyle Robinson

Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Opposition Vice-Chairman

John Francis
Bob Spencer
Ron Clarke

Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Opposition Vice-Chairman

Jeremy Pert
Paul Northcott
Charlotte Atkins

Planning Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Mark Winnington
David Smith

Pensions Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Alastair Little
Mike Davies

Audit and Standards Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Martyn Tittley
Carolyn Trowbridge

Corporate Parenting Panel

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Mark Sutton
Bryan Jones

Charities and Trusts Committee

Chairman

Kath Perry

Vice-Chairman

David Smith

Appointment of Community Cabinet Support Members

South Staffordshire

Mike Davies

Newcastle

Trevor Johnson

Cannock Chase

Phil Hewitt

Lichfield District

Janet Eagland

Tamworth

Jeremy Oates

Staffordshire Moorlands

Ross Ward

East Staffordshire

Bernard Peters

Stafford

Carolyn Trowbridge

14. Appointment of members to Outside Bodies 2018/19

The Council noted that the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Group Leaders, would notify Members of any changes to Appointments to Outside Bodies in the coming days.

15. Questions

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

Question

What actions has the County Council taken to tackle climate change since it declared a Climate Emergency a year ago?

Reply

Since the County Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2020 the authority held an all member workshop to consider potential suitable actions which could form part of a future climate change action plan. All suggestions were considered by the newly formed All Party Climate Change Working Group with the aim of creating a prioritised list. Whilst this work has been temporarily paused due to Covid-19 activities I can confirm that we are looking to approve and publish the plan in the autumn. This will provide a framework to spend the £2.43m of resources that were approved in the current MTFS last February.

Whilst some elements of the climate change work have had to be temporarily paused as the Council responds to the Covid-19 pandemic, I am pleased to report that since declaring a Climate Change emergency a number of activities have still progressed:

- the local authority has switched to green electricity for buildings, street lighting and traffic signals;
- undertaken a full review of the authority's carbon baseline so we can track progress made since our carbon reduction strategy, Green Shoots, was published;
- supporting Engie to ensure the Rugeley site is as sustainable as possible and unlocking innovation;
- jointly commissioned a climate change study to support the refresh of local plans;
- started a review of possible locations for solar farms on county land;
- launched the Waste Savvy Staffordshire campaign;
- worked with SCVYS to capture the views of younger people for our Action Plan;
- ensured climate change is a golden thread of our Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy; and
- Restarted the Climate Change Working Group with its next meeting on 29th July to consider a comprehensive action plan of deliverable items which will be taken through Cabinet.

Work, of course, has continued on many fronts on the numerous activities that support a sustainable Staffordshire such as sustainable transport planning, active travel, building energy management and smart working to name a few.

Supplementary Question

When will real progress be made by the County Council in meeting its climate change obligations, particularly incorporating a green recovery? We have never been in a better time to pursue green initiatives as there is currently public support for directing and shaping the economy towards zero emissions. I hope that the County Council will seize the moment.

Reply

You will see from the list of Cabinet Member Portfolios that the commitment we have to climate change is now set out in a full Cabinet role. Councillor Jessel will be taking on a cabinet portfolio called Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change. I hope that Councillor Atkins recognises that new commitment to the climate change agenda and reshaping our economy and infrastructure in a way that supports those objectives.

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

Given the expected surge in mental health distress following the challenges of Covid-19, will the County Council ensure that the Occupational Therapy Department working at the Kniveden Partnership operating from a County Council owned site at The Mount, Leek has a sustainable future caring for over sixty clients?

Reply

The Kniveden Partnership relates to Growthpoint, an horticulturally based mental health service that was established and is run by North Staffordshire Combined Mental Health Services Trust, (NSCHMST). This service is currently provided by NSCHMST from SCC's Kniveden/Springhill site, at The Mount Leek. This is not a service delivered or commissioned by SCC.

The three individual council owned sites at the Mount are allocated in the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Local Plan for much needed housing development. Sale of these sites will also release money locked into surplus or underused and inefficient properties to invest in our key services.

We will respond to the many challenges that Covid-19 presents and will try to support NSCMHST in their valuable work. When a decision is taken to release the Mount Road sites, SCC will offer advice and guidance to support, if required by NSCMST, in seeking alternative community options for its 47 service users.

Supplementary Question

This project has done excellent work and I hope that the Partnership will get more support from the County Council and that the Council will work with Combined Health to make sure that this project survives and grows, whether it be on this site or another?

Reply

I meet with the Chairmen and Chief Executives of the Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust and also Combined Healthcare on a monthly basis and we have been talking about mental health challenges. I can't give a specific solution to this particular case but I will certainly look into it with officers and Councillor McMahon can pick this up with Dr Harding in due course.

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

Question

I am sure that the Leader will have been pleased to hear the comments made in Parliament by Wes Streeting MP, Shadow Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, citing the County Council's Covid19 Support Fund as an example of "the creativity and ingenuity" of local authorities during this crisis.

Can he tell me please whether all Members have fully spent their first tranche of this fund and publish a list of Members' allocations - by Member and by organisation - as has always been the case with previous Community Fund allocations?

Reply

I am very pleased by the efforts of Members to spend their allocations of the Covid-19 Support Fund, to support the most vulnerable in our communities and help our key community groups to survive throughout the crisis period.

Members who had not fully spent their first tranche of the Covid-19 Support Fund by the end of June are now able to use any underspend in the current tranche as addition to their extra £2000. This closes for applications on 30 October 2020.

As has been the case previously, it is important to show transparency on how Members have used this public money, and the county council's website has an area devoted to this. From the area where groups can make their applications, there is a link to a page called "Covid-19 Support Fund Projects supported in 2020". This provides information, by Member, showing allocation amounts, organisation name and a brief summary of the project, using information provided in the original applications. The page is constantly being updated – as soon as a project is paid and is closed in the processing system, the information will appear on this page.

Supplementary Question

I have tried to find the information about individual Councillor spend and the organisations supported from the link provided but it is very difficult. Therefore, will the Leader let us have a list detailing spend per Member on the first tranche of the Covid-19 Support Fund?

Reply

I will speak with the lead officer but spend per Member is a pretty crude indicator of the activities of Members in their communities and I do not consider that is the right way to go.

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

Question

Can the Cabinet Member for Communities please set out what Strategy the County Council has in place to help tackle the plague of misuse of Nitrous Oxide in communities across Staffordshire? Specifically, what strategy and action has been taken by the County Council's Trading Standards department in relation to this issue and will the Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council commit to writing to all Staffordshire MPs to press the Government for tougher action on dealing with this problem?

Reply

Firstly, I thought it would be useful to provide Council members with some background information on Nitrous Oxide.

Nitrous oxide (N₂O) is a colourless sweet-tasting gas often referred to as 'laughing gas' and it has several legitimate uses in medicine and dentistry. It is also used as a

fuel additive and as a component of rocket fuel, and is sold as an aerosol spray propellant within whipped cream canisters.

Products include small canisters in large packs, each enough for a recreational dose, and paraphernalia such as 'creamers' or 'crackers'. These dispense the gas from canisters into balloons, which are used to inhale the gas. Nitrous Oxide is covered under Psychoactive Substances Act 2016,

The act bans psychoactive substances, known as 'legal highs', in the UK and prevents the supply of previously unregulated and frequently harmful substances for human consumption.

This Act also includes controls on a number of other products including solvent-based glues, any kind of aerosols and nail varnish/nail varnish remover. Retailers need to pay particular attention to the potential for abuse of nitrous oxide, especially where customers seek to buy in bulk or large volumes involving nitrous oxide.

Trading Standards work closely with the Police and following the implementation of the new act in 2016 did a lot of work removing "Legal Highs" and providing advice and guidance to retailers to ensure they took the necessary precautions. Initially when the act was introduced trading standards committed a large amount of resource to education and advice to retailers over a period of several months. However more recently we have received no intelligence regarding matters relating to Nitrous oxide and, as with any enforcement, trading standards act on intelligence received to base any response accordingly.

Our Police partners also inform us that they also have no intelligence of any specific problems currently regarding nitrous oxide, advising that empty canisters have been seen discarded on the side of the road, but that there is no impact on crime reports. Should intelligence or complaints be received into trading standards this will be investigated, in conjunction with the police, as each partner has specific powers within the Act and enforcement is most effective with joint working.

The Staffordshire Safer & Stronger Communities Strategy Group acts as the countywide strategy group for community safety and is responsible for producing a Community Safety Agreement based on the priority areas highlighted in the County Community Safety Strategic Assessment. The latest strategic assessment was produced earlier this year and the SSSCSG is currently updating its Community Safety Agreement with the current priority areas highlighted in the strategic assessment. This recent strategic assessment has not highlighted Nitrous Oxide as an area of concern and therefore no specific actions are currently identified for the partnership. Districts and Boroughs may have this area highlighted as an issue within the Strategic assessment for their own Local Authority area and may have developed plans to address at local level.

Supplementary Question

What more will the County Council do to assist in educating some of our young people about the dangers of misusing Nitrous Oxide?

Reply

I will ask Councillor Price, with officers, to see what we can do in conjunction with the Criminal Justice service and the Staffordshire Constabulary.

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

Question

4.2 million children were living in poverty in the UK in 2018/19 and the Government's Social Mobility Commission recently highlighted the shocking fact that there has been an increase of 600,000 more children living in relative poverty since 2012. In light of this appalling situation will the Leader of the Council now commit to reversing his administration's decision to cut and close Staffordshire County Council's Local Welfare Assistance Fund?

Reply

Within Staffordshire we have been working for some time with the MHCLG on the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme. This programme is focussed on a range of outcomes one of which is financial exclusion. As such we have a range of support that is available to families in Staffordshire including;

- Access to employment advisors who can support families to maximise their income and support them to access volunteering, training or alternative employment. These employment advisors have mapped out a range of support to assist families which includes the community support groups, access to funding, emergency equipment all of which is accessible and available for families in need.
- The borough and district councils offer support to families facing financial hardship with rent and council tax.
- We fund a range of organisations to support families to manage their finances including Money Smart in Newcastle-under-Lyme which run through aspire for all Newcastle's families. This service supports with budgeting, reducing bills, maximising income, accessing emergency funds and savings. We hope that this service helps families develop the skills needed to support their ongoing financial security.

During COVID-19 we have been working hard to ensure that families in need are supported and the potential risks are identified. This has included the delivery of a targeted access to a virtual family hub and survival kit which have been delivered to over 3000 children. These survival kits have shared details of the family hubs and connected people to community support. In addition, the government have announced additional funding for food and emergency supplies, and this will be available to support families over the next 12 months.

The Early Help partnership have agreed that Financial Exclusion is a common theme which may require a countywide focus and funding from the 20 / 21 Earned Autonomy budget. A multi-agency partnership Task Group has been established to map existing provision, identify gaps and demand and scope the potential to commission a service across the county using Earned Autonomy funding.

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

Question

How many BAME enterprises have been awarded monies from the £500K business grant scheme and have received additional support within the Staffordshire county area?

Reply

The County Council does treat all business equally that request our support. However, we can't provide any data on ethnicity of businesses for the County Council's Emergency Business Grant nor the wider support provided through the Growth Hub, as this is data we do not collect from a business when they request support. It is also data that is not required by government when using their funding to support businesses.

We do know the locations of businesses and can make an assumption that some them will be from BAME groups given the diversity of Staffordshire's communities, but this is not formal confirmation of them being BAME enterprises.

We are completely supportive of all our communities, including BAME, and I am grateful Mr Hussain posed this question. Considering this, we will review our processes to reaffirm equal access to opportunity and indeed if improvements can be made.

Mr Hussain asked the following question of Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

What has been the county's response to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on the BAME community?

Reply

The Council recognises that people from BAME communities are at higher risk of complications from Covid-19. Information about Covid-19 has been made available on the Council's website in a range of the most common languages spoken by BAME communities. The Council's Covid-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan includes targeted communication for people from BAME communities.

In recent weeks the Council has been working with the BAME communities in parts of Burton-on-Trent in response to an excess of cases in the local area. The Council has been engaging with these communities to promote awareness of Covid-19 prevention and control as well as how to access testing. The Council has deployed a mobile testing unit to the town and established a dedicated service to offer testing to symptomatic people from this area in their own homes. The Council is also exploring innovative ways to extend testing to asymptomatic people from these communities.

16. Petitions

(i) Footpath between Colton and Rugeley

Mr Tittley presented a petition from Colton Parish Council seeking improvements to the footpath running alongside the B5014 between Colton and Rugeley.

(ii) Request for Traffic Calming measures along Sydney Street, Burton upon Trent

Mr Clarke presented a petition from local residents seeking the implementation of traffic calming measures along Sydney Street, Burton upon Trent.

Chairman