

## **Statement of the Leader of the Council**

### **1. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 2, 2020/21**

The Cabinet have received an overview of the County Council's progress, performance and financial position in delivering against its Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan. They noted that, at the end of Quarter 2, the overall assessment on the Council's performance and financial position was amber. Significant progress had been made in the recovery of services and the organisation, whilst there were some areas of risk in Adult Social Care and Families and Communities. The latest revenue forecast outturn showed a forecast overspend of £1.809m (0.3%). This is mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cabinet have also approved the use of £0.384m of Contingency to fund part of the agreed pay award for 2020/21.

*(Cabinet – 21 October 2020)*

### **2. Staffordshire Better Care Fund 2020/21 and the Disabled Facilities Grant**

The Cabinet have considered details of Staffordshire Better Care Fund (BCF) performance, 2019-20; BCF Funding for 2020-21; BCF Guidance and Planning for 2020-21; and the transfer of Disabled Facilities Grant funding to Districts.

It was noted that whilst National Health Service England acknowledged that BCF plans from April 2020 will have not been formally approved, they had indicated that for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations should assume that expenditure of BCF funds should continue on existing services as in 2019/20 in order to maintain capacity in community health and social care. In line with this advice, there would be no substantial change to the BCF Schemes included in the BCF Plan for 2020-21. The proposed schemes for 2020-21 were therefore:

- Admission Avoidance / Discharge to Assess
- Ensuring the Sustainability of Adult Social Care
- Enhanced Primary and Community Care

The Cabinet have also agreed the passport of monies received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for the Disability Facility Grant to the district/borough Councils.

*(Cabinet – 21 October 2020)*

### **3. West Midlands Regional Supported Accommodation Framework Contract**

The Cabinet have approved proposals for a regional commissioning approach to the procurement of supported accommodation provision across the West Midlands to support children in care in their transition to independence.

Under the proposed arrangements, Staffordshire would join with other West Midlands local authorities with responsibilities to "Looked after Children" in creating a Flexible

Framework Agreement to ensure that the local authorities involved can meet their responsibilities to provide supported accommodation for young people who are in the process of leaving care. Staffordshire was to lead the setting up of the Flexible Framework Agreement on behalf of the following West Midlands local Authorities be supported: Birmingham City Council / Birmingham Children's Trust, City of Stoke-on-Trent Council, City of Wolverhampton Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Herefordshire Council, Sandwell Children's Trust, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Telford and Wrekin Council Walsall Council Warwickshire County Council, Worcestershire County Council (through Worcestershire Children First).

*(Cabinet – 21 October 2020)*

#### **4. Impact of COVID-19 on SCC Communities, Economy and Organisation – October 2020 Update**

The Cabinet have considered the approach to be taken by the Council regarding its planning and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted that, as an organisation, the Council became a more flexible and dynamic workforce by successfully employing agile working practices and digital solutions. Internal and external collaborations and relationships also improved. A culture of trust was created through staff empowerment, support for and by communities in Staffordshire was accelerated and we were able to share data and make intelligence-driven decisions.

The Cabinet also noted that recovery had provided an opportunity to shape a different future, addressing threats and building on the positive outcomes from this emergency. The Council was to reset its five strategic priorities and four principles as it emerged from the emergency, developing a revised strategic plan and MTFS process to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the Council's strategies (digital, people, communities and climate), transformation programmes and organisation, and the reshaped vision of the future.

It was also noted that, as detailed in the June Cabinet paper (Impact of COVID-19 on SCC Communities, Economy and Organisation and Recovery Approaches), each directorate was leading recovery for its own area, and recovery which cut across all the directorates was being led through recovery groups linked to the four principles – communities, digital, people and climate change. Any coordination of activity required was being managed through the SCC Planning and Recovery Group.

*(Cabinet – 21 October 2020)*

#### **5. Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board**

The Cabinet have received an update from the COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board and have received details of the Council's continuing efforts to prevent and control the spread of Covid-19; the rapid increase in the number of cases of Covid-19 in Staffordshire at the end of October and its impact on the NHS, compounded by staff shortages due to sickness and/or self-isolation; the profound effect of the ongoing restrictions on physical and mental well-being and the economy including rising levels of obesity and poor diet; the Council's management of incidents

in a range of settings, including care providers, schools and workplaces; improvements to the availability of testing, with more NHS Test and Trace facilities available, complemented by a Community Testing team at a range of sites across the county and plans to roll out rapid testing.

The Cabinet were also informed that the Department for Work and Pensions had announced a significant package of extra financial support for those most in need of help with the cost of food, energy and water bills, and other associated costs this winter. The £170 million COVID-19 Winter Grant Scheme would be available from December until the 31 March 2021, with the County Council receiving just over £2.2m to support people in Staffordshire. At least 80% of the total funding would be ring-fenced to support families with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to other types of households, including individuals. For Staffordshire this equated to £1.77 million for children and £440,000 for adults. The Cabinet has delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to decide the eligibility criteria for distribution of the Covid-19 Winter Grant Scheme.

*(Cabinet – 18 November 2020)*

## **6. Support Provided to Business Start-ups in Staffordshire**

The Cabinet have considered the support provided to Business Start-ups in Staffordshire and have approved proposals for the creation of a digital Start Up Prospectus for potential new business in Staffordshire. They have also noted the progress being made to identify the County Council properties that could be used as incubation space in an Enterprise Quarter for Start-Up's; and have approved the funding and delivery of a student start-up programme targeted at young people in the final year of further education with aspirations to progress into self-employment.

*(Cabinet – 18 November 2020)*

## **7. Adult Learning Disability 2022 Community Offer: Update on Learning Disability Services Directly Provided by Staffordshire County Council**

The Cabinet have reviewed proposals for the future of adult learning disability services directly provided by Staffordshire County Council to ensure that they will remain appropriate post COVID-19. They have also considered proposals to develop a single integrated Adult Learning Disability service and extend the range of support offered for people in their homes and communities as well as continuing to provide care for people during the day and overnight, offering people a better experience.

They have noted the progress;

- With commissioning of supported living services from the independent market to replace the residential service provided by the Council at Greenfields House in Staffordshire Moorlands and the care provided by the Council at Horninglow Bungalows in East Staffordshire.
- Of the redevelopment of residential care in Lichfield.

- Of the refurbishment of Wilmott Drive to provide residential replacement care alongside specialist day opportunities in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The Cabinet have also requested that an options analysis be undertaken for future provision of residential replacement care in Staffordshire, with results being presented to Cabinet in the first quarter of 2021; have approved an extension to the current contractual arrangements for residential replacement care in Cannock and East Staffordshire with the current contracted provider; and have asked that a business case be developed for the potential expansion of specialist day opportunities and residential replacement care to offer a greater range of support for people in their homes and communities as part of a single integrated service and that service users, carers and stakeholders be engaged in the codesign of a service model.

*(Cabinet – 18 November 2020)*

## **8. Half Yearly Treasury Management Report for the Period Ended 30 September 2020**

They Cabinet have considered a summary of the Council's borrowing and investment activities during the first six months of the year and have noted that the UK economy continued to face an uncertain environment in 2020/21, with Brexit negotiations and the impacts of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. They also noted that the County Council has continued to adhere to its Treasury Management Policy of using internal cash balances instead of borrowing money and that this had delivered significant savings for taxpayers, as the infrastructure to deliver more skilled, better-paid jobs was being funded at a lower cost.

The Cabinet also noted that the Council had a large cash holding for the financial year 2020/21. This had been regularly discussed by the Treasury Management Panel and arrangements were made for the secure deposit of cash in line with the Annual Investment Strategy. The impact of this was that the variable interest rate prudential limit was exceeded. This indicator was calculated based on the highest expected cash balance in the year which, as a result of additional grant announced after the budget setting process, had been higher than forecast. In view of this the indicator was being revised from £183million to £255million.

*(Cabinet – 18 November 2020)*

## **9. Covid-19 Latest**

During the second national lockdown we did see case rates across the county fall significantly. However, despite everyone's best efforts, together with Stoke-on-Trent, we were placed in the Very High Alert Level on December 2.

The challenge now is to build on the progress we have made and keep figures down. Our priority now is to see the restrictions lifted as quickly as possible so we can all go back to some of the freedoms we once enjoyed.

It is hugely important too that business which have been forced to stay closed, reopen as quickly as possible.

The Government looks at a number of factors when deciding which tier an area is placed in, including the capacity at our local hospitals, so unfortunately it is not as simple as just looking at case numbers.

The next review will be on December 16 and we are continuing to work with our MPs to do the best for Staffordshire.

## **10. Testing**

Staffordshire is one of 66 authorities taking part in the mass roll out of the rapid Covid-19 testing for people with no symptoms. This will complement the testing for people with symptoms at the national sites across Staffordshire.

For us, the focus initially will be on large employers, post-16 education and community Covid hotspots. This will be in addition to national testing in care settings and in universities.

Keele University has been running its “military-style” testing this month to make sure as many students as possible can go home for Christmas. The great thing about the new tests is that results take around 30 minutes, so it means the students can be packed and ready to go as soon as they get the second negative test they need.

Over the coming weeks, we will be testing many more people, eventually looking to test around 10 per cent of the Staffordshire population every week. Scaling up from a few hundred tests per week to more than 80,000 will of course take significant logistical planning.

## **11. Government Spending Review**

Following the Government Spending Review, we are currently going through the finer details of the review to examine what the benefits to the council, to residents and to businesses may be. This is especially important given the huge strain that the Covid-19 has put on public finances this year.

Dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and protecting lives and livelihoods has been our top priority and from the outset we have done and spent what is needed. We have already had significant financial support from Government of over £80m, which is helping us in the current year, but the future is less certain.

The Chancellor also made it clear the “economic emergency” from the pandemic “has only just begun” and with this also announced a pay freeze for public sector workers outside the NHS, which is a reflection on the economic picture and certainly not on the hard work of staff such as those here at the county council.

## **12. Staffordshire Story**

In a year dominated by Covid-19, it is very easy to lose focus of the great things about living and working in Staffordshire.

Behind the scenes, public and private sector leaders have been working together throughout 2020 to develop a new story and approach to promoting the county, to attract investment, and create more well-paid jobs and opportunities for Staffordshire people.

More than 200 businesses and organisations came together for a virtual launch via Zoom at the end of November. During the event they heard about a new Staffordshire story and emerging plans to promote the county and reignite its economy following the Covid pandemic.

After the year we've had, it is more important than ever that we look to the future, raise our heads, and raise the profile of this great county.

### **13. Finally**

It has been an incredibly difficult year and undoubtedly more hard work and new challenges still lie ahead.

However, I am incredibly proud of the efforts made across this county from care homes, to schools, to our army of volunteers, to our staff and indeed to people in this chamber.

I have been truly humbled at times by the steps people have taken and the sacrifices people have made.

However, this year has proven to me that here in Staffordshire we have the determination, the resilience and the strength to get through this pandemic.

Christmas this year will be very different for many of us, but I would like to wish you and your families all a merry Christmas and a safe, peaceful and more hopeful new year in 2021.