

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Staffordshire Prosperity Update

The Government's announcement that two schemes in the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP area (Middleport Pottery in Burslem and Alstom in Stafford) will benefit from the new Regional Growth Fund is a major achievement that will help attract jobs and prosperity to the county.

There are also encouraging signs of economic confidence returning, with JCB recruiting increasing numbers of workers and Hilton Hotels developing two hotels on a single site in East Staffordshire

(Cabinet – 20 April 2011)

2. Staffordshire Families and Communities Update

The county council continues to play an active part in improving the lives of Staffordshire people, even in these times of financial constraint. We are concentrating on priorities that meet our twin goals of supporting economic recovery while looking after the most vulnerable people in our communities.

While other authorities are scaling back their services, we continue to roll out major initiatives such as our concessionary travel cards, 20mph zones and we continue to perform at a higher level than the national average, for instance with the recent positive assessment of the youth offending service.

The County Council is also supporting young Staffordshire sportspeople who are making the grade on the national stage and some with an eye on the 2012 Olympics. Forty-two young were recently presented with a cheque from the Council's Young People's Sports Performance Grant Scheme

(Cabinet – 20 April 2011)

3. Appointment of Director of Children's Services

The County Council must designate a member of its senior leadership team as its statutory Director of Children's Services. Sally Rees, who currently holds the post, will be leaving in September and the intention had been to transfer the role at that time to Eric Robinson, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for People

The Cabinet have, however, agreed that it would be better to transfer the statutory role to Eric Robinson as from 1 May 2011 as the overall responsibility for the commissioning (and delivery) of services for children has been integrated with services for people and families under Eric Robinson, Sally Rees will continue to support Eric in the role until she leaves the Council later in the year.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2011)

4. Renewable Energy Generation on the Council's Land and Buildings

Energy conservation and renewable energy generation has the potential to save the council money and also to generate additional revenue. It is therefore important that the Council has a clear policy statement that sets out its ambitions in this regard.

The Cabinet have therefore approved the following statement of policy with respect to renewable energy generation on the council's land and buildings:

“Staffordshire County Council recognises the need to invest in both energy conservation measures and renewable energy generation as a means of reducing its carbon dioxide emissions and its fuel costs.

The council does not wish to pursue the option of commercial-scale wind energy generation on its land holding because of the potential environmental impacts of that technology. The council does, however, have an aspiration to bring forward sufficient projects involving all other renewable energy technologies to ensure that it remains on course to meet its overall carbon reduction target.”

The policy statement will make it clear that the County Council recognises the need to invest in energy conservation and renewable energy in order to reduce fuel costs and carbon emissions. It also makes it clear that the County Council will not be pursuing commercial scale wind energy generation on county council land because of the impact of this technology on the environment and local residents.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2011)

5. Publication of statutory proposal to discontinue Blake Valley Technology College

Earlier this year, the County Council initiated a period of formal consultation on the proposal to close Blake Valley Technology College on 31 August 2011. Implementation of the closure will be conditional upon the Secretary of State for Education entering into a legal Funding Agreement with Staffordshire University, the proposed sponsor, to establish a new Academy on the school site.

The key themes arising from the consultation responses were admissions; staffing, curriculum, building works, academy sponsorship and requests for further information. Seventeen respondents were in favour of Blake Valley staying open and 15 felt the Academy proposal presented a good opportunity.

After considering the comments made as part of the consultation, the Cabinet were of the view that this proposal provided a tremendous opportunity to transform the learning environment in Blake, both in terms of the access to funding for investment in the school and also the link with the University as the sponsor. Accordingly, they have decided that the County Council should

proceed with publication of the statutory notice to discontinue the Blake Valley Technology College.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2011)

6. 2010/11 Joint Fourth Quarter/Outturn Performance and Budget Monitoring Report

The County Council is continuing to respond to the challenges that lie ahead through an ambitious programme of innovation and by operating more efficiently.

We have achieved this while continuing to keep a tight control on our finances. Our revenue budget will be slightly overspent to the tune of around £4 million or approximately 1% of the budget, but this is in the context of the need to make £21 million of savings on the past budget and therefore represents a tremendous achievement.

One of the highlights from the year has been the establishment of the Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership which is now widely regarded as one of the most advanced in the country. This was demonstrated by the highly successful business engagement event on 7 January attended by over 250 business leaders, and clearly shows our willingness to support local business as the creators of future prosperity in the county.

The enhancement of the Concessionary Travel scheme by the County Council also stands out. As from the 1 April, this will allow pass holders to travel free of charge at all times on buses across the county, and for certain categories of disabled people to be accompanied at no cost by a companion. On top of this we have agreed to introduce (from the 1st June) a discounted travel scheme for all young people aged 19 and under allowing travel on local buses anywhere within Staffordshire for a maximum fare of £1.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2011)

7. Keele University Science and Business Park - IC5

The Keele University Science and Business Park (Keele) is a key site for Staffordshire as it has the potential to deliver the high technology, high quality jobs that will drive the future prosperity of Staffordshire. To help deliver this proposal we have been working with Keele on a proposal to construct 30,000 sq ft of new offices in a centre known as Incubator 5 (IC5). IC5 will help to support existing high tech businesses to expand their operations to create new jobs and diversify the local economy.

It was hoped that the project would attract funding via the Regional Growth Fund but, sadly, the bid was not successful. Accordingly, the Cabinet have requested that the business case for the development of the IC5 building project be revised and that a further report be submitted to their next meeting.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2011)

Portfolio Holder Delegated Decisions

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

- The publication of proposals to change the designation of Blackfriars Special School, Newcastle-under-Lyme from that of a school for children with physical disabilities to a generic special school.
- The approval of the 2011/12 Capital Grants Scheme for village halls and community centres.
- The granting of a 10 year lease of the former upper building at Great Wood Community Primary School, Tean to Checkley Parish Council with Tean Village Hall Committee.
- The granting of a 6 year tenancy of Holding No. 1, Yarlet Estate.
- The granting of a 3 year Farm Business Tenancy of Holding No. 50, Plardiwick Estate.
- Approval to the County Council becoming the host authority for West Midlands Councils with effect from 1 June 2011 and the transfer of the West Midlands Councils' staff to Staffordshire County Council under TUPE regulations.
- For the County Council to not take up the power to make any post-compulsory education discretionary awards for the year 2011/12.

7. Forward Plan

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

8. Shugborough Revisited

I was honoured to officially open "Shugborough Revisited" on 30 March 2011. The former private apartments of Lord Patrick Lichfield are now open to visitors for the first time. They provide a unique insight into the private life of one of the most iconic figures of the swinging '60s.

In addition, the island arboretum opened for public access providing an improved offer to those visiting the great estate. These two extra attractions will no doubt help to increase the number of tourists and Staffordshire families who spend time at Shugbrough, thereby boosting the county's economy.

9. Local Government Association (LGA) work

During late March 2011, I was pleased to participate in a round table discussion at the LGA's headquarters in London regarding the challenge presented nationally by the long term funding of social care and support. This was my opportunity, on behalf of Staffordshire, to influence the Commission on Funding of Care and Support which will produce its vital review for the government during the summer of 2011. I made sure that Staffordshire's views will help inform one of the most crucial current policy debates.

10. Staffordshire Parish Council Association

In Staffordshire, we have three tiers of local government. The parish councils are a vital local layer of representation and the county council welcomes the contribution that they make to building empowered and active communities. As part of our regular liaison, on 5 April 2011 I chaired the annual meeting of the Staffordshire Parish Council Association (executive members) with senior representatives of the county council. We discussed a number of issues including the national policy developments regarding Big Society and localism. Both parties are committed to continuing our excellent working relationship and ensuring that opportunities for closer working are fully exploited.

11. Whistle stop tours

I am making sure that I am getting out and about around the county and over the last few weeks I have toured Staffordshire Moorlands, Newcastle and Tamworth.

These visits included the Moorlands Connects Bus Service which is providing a lifeline to rural communities; the award winning Room 21 in Leek which brings together family support in one place; a pioneering extra-care development for older people in Madeley which has received an unprecedented level of involvement from the local community; a one stop shop in Chesterton run by local volunteers, Aspire PM Training and its work with young people and apprentices; major highways works to develop Ventura Park which will help to promote local economic development and a whistle stop tour of the many community initiatives across Tamworth ending at the new Community Fire Station. These are just some examples (there are many more) of innovative projects led or supported by the county council which are making a real difference to families and local communities or contributing to the prosperity of the county.

P.E.B. Atkins
Leader of the Council