

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 14 October 2021

Attendance

Arshad Afsar	Graham Hutton	David Smith
Charlotte Atkins	Thomas Jay	Paul Snape (Chairman)
Philip Atkins, OBE	Jason Jones	Mike Sutherland
Gill Burnett	Peter Kruskonjic	Mark Sutton
Tina Clements	Ian Lawson	Stephen Sweeney
Richard Cox	Tom Loughbrough-	Simon Tagg
Mike Davies	Rudd	Samantha Thompson
Mark Deaville	Johnny McMahon	Carolyn Trowbridge
Janet Eagland	Paul Northcott	Ross Ward
Ann Edgeller	Jeremy Oates	Jill Waring
Keith Flunder	Gillian Pardesi	Alan White
Richard Ford	Ian Parry	Philip White
John Francis	Jeremy Pert	Conor Wileman
Colin Greatorex	Bernard Peters	Bernard Williams
Gill Heath	Jonathan Price	David Williams
Jill Hood	Robert Pritchard	Victoria Wilson
Derrick Huckfield	James Salisbury	Mark Winnington
Philip Hudson	Janice Silvester-Hall	Mike Worthington

Apologies for absence: Jak Abrahams, Philippa Haden, Phil Hewitt, Syed Hussain, Julia Jessel, Kath Perry, MBE, Bob Spencer, Mike Wilcox and Ian Wilkes.

PART ONE

27. 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
Mark Deaville	30	Personal	Director of Nexus
Mark Winnington	30	Personal	Director of Nexus
Connor Wileman	30	Personal	Director of Harvey Girls

28. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 22 July 2021

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 22 July 2021 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

29. Chairman's Correspondence

Honorary Alderman Brian Edwards MBE

The Chairman informed the Council of the death on 13 August 2021 of Honorary Alderman Brian Edwards MBE. Mr Edwards represented the Kinver (South Staffordshire) County Electoral Division on the County Council between 1989 and 2017. He served on a number of the Council's Committees including the Audit and Standards Committee, Planning Committee, Policy and Resources Committee, Waste Disposal Committee, Corporate Review Committee, Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee (of which he served as Chairman), and the Charities and Trusts Committee.

Mr Edwards was awarded the MBE in 2015 for Services to the Community. He was also appointed as an Honorary Alderman in 2017 in recognition of the contribution he had made to the work of the Council.

Cllrs Wilson, Philip Atkins, Winnington and David Williams paid tribute to Mr Edwards following which Members observed a one minute silence in his memory.

Honorary Alderman Terry Alec Dix

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended congratulations to Honorary Alderman Terry Dix of Tamworth on his recent award of the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (German equivalent of the OBE).

The award was presented at the German Embassy in London by Ambassador Andreas Michaelis and was in recognition Terry's work to help establish the town twinning between Bad Laasphe and Tamworth, Staffordshire and his selfless interest, in the name of peace and understanding, in the Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery and memorial.

The Ambassador said: "Town twinings create vibrant links between our societies. Now, especially, they are more important than ever. Each one of the more than 480 twinings between German and British communities builds bridges between our countries and brings people

closer together. Your outstanding commitment to supporting the twinning between Bad Laasphe and Tamworth over decades and indeed to this day is impressive and an example to us all.”

Cllrs Oates, Charlotte Atkins and Clements paid tribute Mr Dix for the valuable contribution he had made in establishing and maintaining the town twinning between Bad Laasphe and Tamworth and also for his work in relation to the German War Grave Cemetery on Cannock Chase.

Retirement of Andrew A Haigh, HM Senior Coroner Staffordshire (South)

The Chairman informed the Council of the proposed retirement on 31 October 2021 of Andrew A Haigh, HM Senior Coroner Staffordshire (South). The Council extended their thanks to Mr Haigh for his services to the County and wished him well in his retirement.

Cllr Ross Ward

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended congratulations to Cllr Ward on his forthcoming marriage.

30. Statement of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council.

Intensive Support for Staffordshire Children with Disabilities

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired about impact of the proposals on the provision of Youth Clubs for children with Special Educational Needs. In response, Cllr Sutton offered to meet with Cllr Atkins to discuss her concerns.

Child Exploitation and Missing Children & Young People Service

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Cllr Sutton informed the Council that this issue was a priority for the Council and that the new contact would address all forms of child exploitation.

Public Health Commissioning Plans

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Cllr McMahon informed the Council that, during the Covid pandemic, Public Health alcohol services provision had been increased by 10%, not only to help those described as “problem drinkers” but also those referred to as

“hazardous drinkers”. He extended his thanks to Human Kind, the providers of the service.

In response to concerns expressed by Cllr Charlotte Atkins in relation to reductions in Government funding for Public Health over the past five years, Cllr Alan White confirmed that he had recently met with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss the need for adequate funding for the County Council.

Recommission of Staffordshire Integrated Advocacy Service

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Cllr Northcote indicated that he was pleased to see the Cabinet’s commitment to the provision of advocacy services. In response, Cllr Sutton indicated that there was a statutory requirement for the Council to provide such services.

UK Community Renewal Fund - Priority Projects

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Cllr Huckfield about the level of deprivation in the area he served and his hope that the Council would look carefully at what support could be provided to the villages in Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough, Cllr Philip White indicated that Newcastle Borough had been identified as a priority area to receive funding under the scheme.

Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 1 2021/22

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Cllr Winnington indicated that he was pleased to see the planned overspend on capital projects and he enquired as to what type of schemes were coming forward. In response, Cllr Parry indicated that the Capital Programme would fund a wide range of projects including spending on schools, roads and other infrastructure schemes.

Cllr Francis referred to traffic issues at Beaconside in Stafford arising from new housing developments. He also expressed the view that more needed to be done with regard to Section 106 monies being used to improve the infrastructure in Stafford. Cllr Smith also referred to similar traffic issues in Lichfield as a consequence of new developments in the city. In response, Cllr David Williams referred to the planning restrictions as to how Section 106 monies could be utilised. He added that Members should contact him directly if they had any concerns as to how Section 106 monies were being used in their area.

Cllr Alan White added that he was pleased to see the wide range of infrastructure projects taking place in the County.

Framework Agreement for the Provision of Asbestos Removal and Encapsulation Services

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Cllr Price referred to the additional £5.5m allocation for the Schools Capital Programme in Staffordshire and how important it was to ensure that appropriate framework agreements were in place to so that works, such as asbestos removal from school buildings, were carried out in a timely manner and at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer. In response, Cllr Deaville indicated that all proposals to enter into Framework Agreements were scrutinised to ensure they offered value for money.

COVID-19

(Paragraphs 10, 17 and 18 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins asked the Leader as to whether he was aware that school pupils who attained the age of 16 were no longer eligible to have a Covid vaccine given to them in school and that they needed to obtain one elsewhere. She, together with Cllr Francis, also referred to shortages of the Flu vaccination in Leek and Stafford. In response, Cllr McMahon undertook to raise with the NHS the issue of those school pupils who attained the age of 16 not being able to obtain their vaccination at their school. He also indicated that there had been a short delay in the roll-out of the Flu vaccination which was why there had been a temporary shortage in some areas. He added that the Flu vaccination was available in pharmacies as well as at GP practices.

Cllr Smith indicated that he was delighted with the success of the Covid vaccination programme across the County. He also expressed his concern and disappointment with regard to those individuals who were spreading false information about the vaccine and those who were protesting outside schools. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that the issue of anti-vaccine protests outside schools was being raised with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and also with the Chief Constable. Cllr Cox expressed his thanks to Cllr McMahon for the action being taken in relation to the anti-vaccine protests outside the Friary School in Lichfield.

Cllr Price referred to Covid levels in schools and indicated that, in some areas, the rates had plateaued and were now starting to fall.

Cllr Francis expressed concern about difficulties some of his constituents were encountering in getting face-to-face appointments with their GPs. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that this issue was being considered by Central Government.

Cllr Pardesi expressed the view that Covid was not over and could be with us for a very long time as vaccine rates in some countries remained low.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Cllrs Oates, Winnington, Northcote, Sweeney, Burnett, Waring and Sutherland referred to development and regeneration schemes currently taking place in Tamworth, Stafford, Newcastle and Cannock including those schemes aimed at regenerating town centres. Cllr Sutherland also asked that the County Council work with Cannock Chase District Council to develop additional spaces for new business start-ups.

Cllr Smith referred to young enterprise and the support available to them. He also highlighted the importance of apprenticeships.

Cllr Deaville also referred to the bounce-back of the hospitality sector following the lifting of Covid restrictions.

Cllr Philip Atkins spoke about the important role played by the Midlands Engine and Midlands Connect and how the Council was working with neighbouring authorities on regional development schemes such as improvements to the A50. He also enquired as to whether any progress had been made regarding the proposed North Midlands Manufacturing Corridor. In response, Cllr Philip White and Cllr Alan White indicated that the Council was engaging with relevant Authorities including the Midlands Engine on pursuing the concept of the North Midlands Manufacturing Corridor.

Developing Family Hubs in Staffordshire

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Cllr Edgeller referred to the vital role played by Children's Centres during the Covid pandemic and expressed the hope that the proposed new Family Hubs would include the provision of mental health support for young people. Cllr Charlotte Atkins added that she hoped that the development of the Family Hubs would not lose focus on early years provision. Cllr Flunder stated that he would also like to see the Family Hubs expanding to form Community Hubs. In response, Cllr Sutton indicated that the proposals would build upon what Children's Centres were already doing. He also confirmed that the concentration on early years provision would not be lost and that the Hubs would provide support in respect of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Cllr Pardesi referred to the role of the Family Hubs, including its preventative work/early intervention, and enquired as to why the Council had previously decided to close many of its Sure Start and Youth Centres. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that we could lament over what had happened in the past but that did not serve any purpose whatsoever. He added that the Council was coming up with solutions to issues it was facing today, not looking backwards.

High Needs Provision Capital Allocation Funding

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Cllr Price referred to the Council's commitment to the SEND agenda. He also commended the Council's SEND Strategy to all Members.

Strategic Review of the Care Home Market in Staffordshire 2021

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

Cllr Pardesi and Cllr Charlotte Atkins referred to the impact of the Covid on the care home market and also how, early in the pandemic, the failure to test patients for Covid when discharging them from hospital back into care homes had resulted in additional deaths. They, together with Cllr Parry, also referred to the lessons which needed to be learned as highlighted in the Parliamentary report.

Cllr Winnington referred to the important role played by Nexxus Cares in providing reablement services and in plugging the gaps in the Care Home market provision. Cllr Deaville also invited Cllr Pardesi to see first-hand the work of Nexxus Cares. Cllr Hood also paid tribute to the commitment of the employees of Nexxus Cares and the need for the work of all those working in the Care Sector to be recognised and properly remunerated. In response, Cllr Alan White agreed that the point about pay was a fair one which needed to be addressed.

Cllr McMahon highlighted the support provided by the Council during the pandemic including ensuring that no Care Home went without PPE.

Olympics and Paralympics

(Paragraph 19 of the Statement)

Cllrs Oates, Peters, Charlotte Atkins, Hudson and Worthington paid tribute to the Staffordshire Olympians and Paralympians who took part in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. They also referred to the inspiration they gave to others, including those with disabilities. Cllr Oates also paid tribute to the parents and carers of young athletes for the support they provided. He also extended his thanks to the National Lottery for the financial support it provided to Sport.

Afghan Evacuees

(Paragraph 20 of the Statement)

Cllr Tagg expressed his thanks to the staff of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and the County Council for the work they had done in finding temporary accommodation, at very short notice, for the large number of families fleeing Afghanistan. Cllr Edgeller and Cllr Trowbridge also paid

tribute to those, individuals, groups and charitable organisations who had offered assistance to the evacuees, including the provision of food and clothing.

Holiday Activities and Food Programme

(Paragraph 21 of the Statement)

Cllrs Clements, Silvester-Hall and Sutherland paid tribute to the success of the Summer Holiday Activities and Food Programme. Cllr Sutton thanked the Members for their comments and indicated that, in Staffordshire, the Programme offered over 20,000 places over the four weeks it ran. He added that over 600 children with disabilities were also able to attend.

Staffordshire Mental Health Strategy Refresh

Cllr Edgeller encouraged all Members to take part in the survey on the refresh of the Staffordshire Mental Health Strategy and added that a link to the survey would be emailed to all Members at the conclusion of the Council meeting.

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

31. Change to the Constitution - Number of Questions by Members at Full Council

The Council considered a report of the Director for Corporate Services recommending that paragraph 8.3 of Section 12 (Procedural Standing Orders) of the Council's Constitution is amended to limit the maximum number of questions that may be submitted by a member to one rather than the current two. This change would ensure that each member had a better chance of being able to successfully put forward a question at each meeting. It would guarantee that 15 members would be allowed to submit a question at each meeting whereas under the current maximum the number of members able to submit a question could be limited by those members who choose to submit two questions.

The change was presented to the Audit and Standards Committee on the 13 September whereby the recommendation was approved.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins indicated that she was opposed to the proposed changes and expressed the view that Members of the Audit and Standards Committee were misled on 13 September when they were told that she was 'more than happy' with this change; which was not true. She added that there was no evidence that the change was necessary as only once over the past five years had the maximum allowable number of fifteen questions been reached; and that this was an attempt to close down Opposition voices. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that following the County Council

elections in May, 92% of the Council Chamber was Conservative with only 6% being Labour (and 2% Independent). He added that the number of questions being asked by Members of the Labour Group was disproportionate and that the proposed change to the Constitution was necessary to address this.

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED – That paragraph 8.3 of Section 12 (Procedural Standing Orders) of the Council’s Constitution be amended to limit the maximum number of questions that may be submitted by a member to one rather than the current two so that the wording of paragraph 8.3 will then read:

"Each Member may submit a maximum of one question each, however only the first 15 questions received by the Director for Corporate Services before the deadline will be dealt with at the meeting. All other questions will receive a written answer."

32. Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21

Cllr Greatorex moved consideration of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020 - 2021.

Cllrs Greatorex, Clements, Burnett and Pert outlined some of the work their Committees had undertaken over the year and how this had been impacted by the Covid pandemic. They also outlined some of the areas which were going to be scrutinised over the forthcoming year and expressed their thanks to their fellow Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and also to the officers who supported them.

Cllrs Sutton, Philip White and Alan White also paid tribute to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and highlighted the valuable contribution they made in challenging the Council’s Executive.

RESOLVED – That the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020 - 2021 be received.

33. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Cllr Pardesi referred to the on-going recruitment of additional police officers, after years of reducing their numbers; and also expressed surprise that the report before members did not mention the action being taken to tackle violence against women. In response, Cllr Edgeller indicated that she had raised the issue of violence against women with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable at a recent meeting.

Cllr Tagg referred to the work being done by Councils and the Police to make town centres safer.

Cllr Sweeney welcomed the appointment of Rob Barker as Chief Fire Officer following Becci Bryant's announcement of her retirement.

Cllr Peters also informed the Council of the appointment of Chris Noble as the Chief Constable for Staffordshire.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

34. Questions

Cllr Pritchard asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

The Governments On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme has allocated £20 million of funding in 2021 to 2022 financial year for local authorities to install on street EV charging points. The scheme covers 75% of the capital costs of procuring and installing the chargepoint infrastructure.

Will the Cabinet Member inform me how many applications the council is looking to submit, and would Staffordshire County Council look favourably at developing a bid for the Leys in Tamworth?

Reply

I am aware of the Governments On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme and this Council is currently developing its own EV strategy to determine how it can best support the growth of electric vehicles in the future.

The installation of charge points on residential streets, to service homes that do not have off street parking, is a matter that is being carefully considered by many Local Transport Authorities and potential energy providers at the current time.

The availability of charging points in Staffordshire is slowly increasing due to many retailers making provision at end destination points. Before introducing additional street furniture, on certain roads in Staffordshire, we need to think carefully about the future considering the change to different vehicle fuels including electric vehicles and particularly the possible provision of a rapid charging infrastructure.

Supplementary Question

Tamworth Borough Council are meeting with the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles from the Department for Transport. May invite the Cabinet Member, along with relevant officers from the County Council, to attend this meeting?

Reply

I would be happy to attend if I am available.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

What assessment has Staffordshire County Council made of the numbers of people in the County affected by the removal of the £20 uplift in Universal Credit and the impact this will have on them, with the rising costs of living, particularly of energy and food? What additional plans are in place to support vulnerable families struggling to make ends meet after this substantial cut in their household incomes?

Reply

Many people in Staffordshire have received the temporary uplift in Universal Credit and we are working with partners to understand the impact of ending this support. This includes the announcement last week from the Government that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. This new grant will run from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and totals over £5.5 million for Staffordshire.

At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.

A plan for this funding is currently being developed with partners, principally the Borough and Districts, but we expect that this will help people across Staffordshire who are unable to meet the costs for food, energy and water this winter.

Our work to grow employment has meant that the County historically has had low rates of unemployment and high employment rates which has meant that the claimant count is now 3.6% compared to 5.1% nationally. But during the pandemic we have continued our work to support people to progress in work or find work, particularly the low paid and low skilled who have been most affected.

The County wide Redundancy Task Group has provided support to businesses and people to remain in work, upskill and reskill or secure new further employment opportunities. This includes helping to co-ordinate the Government plan for Jobs, promoting the Kickstart and restart schemes helping young people and adults find work. The Recruitment & Redundancy Triage Service has worked with over 2,000 people to find work or training. The Staffordshire Means Back to Business scheme in partnership with our District and Borough Councils provides over £5million to help start or business their grow, train their staff and recruit apprentices. Over £2million has been committed directly to businesses through the scheme creating over 200 apprenticeships and enabled over 200 businesses to upskill their workforce.

Supplementary Question

What assessment has been made of the number of people likely to fall into poverty as a result of this cut in Universal Credit?

Reply

This is a matter of concern for everyone and we are working with our partners in District/Borough Councils to assess that need so that we can address it. When we have that further information, I would be delighted to share it with all Members.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Health and Care whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

To what extent will the Government's proposed reforms and additional funding announced in September for adult social care:

1. ensure the County Council can fund its present and future demand for adult social care
2. deal with workforce issues, such as, existing vacancies, poor pay and conditions
3. have a differential impact in different English regions
4. guarantee that no one needing care will have to sell their home to pay for it

5. compare to the County Council's own 'Social Care Green Paper', which was being drafted some months ago?

Reply

On 7 September HM Government announced a series of proposals for adult social care reform to be implemented from October 2023. These include:

- a. Raising the capital asset thresholds at which the state makes a contribution to the cost of people's care and support.
- b. Setting a 'cap' of £86,000 on the maximum contribution an individual makes to the cost of their care and support in a lifetime.
- c. Support for the workforce – including more training places, mental well-being resource, and recruitment / retention initiatives.
- d. Giving self-funders the option to ask their local authority to arrange their care and support, at local authority rates.

The intention is that these will be supported by a share of £36bn to be raised from a 1.25% increase in National Insurance for workers and employers.

Further details are awaited and therefore it is not yet clear what additional funding will be available, the timescales involved and any preconditions. As soon as further details are known, council members will be informed.

The reforms will benefit people who might otherwise face very high costs for care and support. Local authorities already pay the full cost of people's care and support once their capital assets fall below £14,250. Local authorities also offer deferred payments for people with higher capital assets to prevent people needing to sell their homes to pay for care and support.

Now that the Government has published its own proposals, with further proposals to be developed for adult social care, the County Council will no longer be pursuing its own Green Paper.

Supplementary Question

What social care vacancies do we have in Staffordshire, both in terms of domiciliary care and in the Care Homes and what is the Council doing to ensure that staff vacancies do not lead to a fall in the quality of care both in peoples' homes and also in Care Homes?

Reply

We are assured that in respect of the Care Home market, the vaccination rate is such that it shouldn't have a material effect on the service currently. The staff position across both domiciliary care and the Care Home market is a challenge and we are doing all we can to address that challenge. We have a care development team which supports recruitment and retention in the sector and also assists in the training of staff. I don't have a figure for current vacancies, but I will get that figure and give it to you.

Questions

Cllr Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

When children are hungry, they are unable to concentrate on their studies, which has a detrimental impact on their academic performance and affects their immune system later in life. What more can be done to ensure that children receive an uninterrupted balanced diet in their free school meals, as well as better value for money for those who pay for the food during the term, given that this is often the only major meal of the day for many children, and what strategy is in place to protect them from holiday hunger?

Reply

Since September 2014, children in Reception, year 1 or year 2 can receive free school meals even if they do not meet the entitlement criteria. For other ages, children have to meet the entitlement criteria set by the DfE in order to access a free school meal.

Food served in local authority maintained schools and academies must meet the school food standards so that children have healthy, balanced diets. The school food standards are to ensure that food provided to pupils in school is nutritious and of high quality; promotes good nutritional health in all pupils; protects those who are nutritionally vulnerable and promotes good eating behaviour.

A number of initiatives are currently underway to prevent Holiday Hunger, these include;

- **Holiday Activities and Food:** This is a scheme that was delivered for the first time in Staffordshire this year but has seen thousands of children across the county access both activities and nutritious food during the holidays.

- COVID Winter, Locality and latterly the Household Grant: This scheme administered via LA's on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions has offered children across Staffordshire who access FSM access to supermarket vouchers throughout the holidays to ensure that children and their families have access to food throughout the holidays. We have supported families to make healthy meals using our videos and recipe cards online at [Family Hub Cooking | Staffordshire Connects](#)

Cllr Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Local charities, community interest companies, and community organisations offered vital support to people during the pandemic. They have been found to be an excellent partner in our immunizations, testing, community cohesiveness, and assisting people in overcoming depression and loneliness, as well as women's education and empowerment, among other things. What plans does the council have to provide long-term assistance to these organisations?

Reply

The VCSE sector are a vital partner for Staffordshire County Council in helping our communities to prosper and be healthy and happy. This is evident in the crucial and ongoing role of the VCSE sector in supporting and mobilising our communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract, delivered by SCVYS and Support Staffordshire, has been in place since August 2016. Over the past 5 and a half years, this contract has provided support for the VCSE sector to be sustainable and grow. It has also played a vital role in working with the VCSE sector to help the Council deliver our strategic priorities, including Supportive Communities, Earliest Help, the Place Based Approach, and Staffordshire's offer for Young People. The relationships developed with SCVYS and Support Staffordshire through this contract were also vital in helping organise, support, and sustain the mobilisation of our communities across the pandemic.

The support delivered by the current VCSE Strategic Capacity Building Partnership contract will end on 31st July 2022. As set out in the Communities Delivery Plan 2021-22 (agreed by Cabinet in December 2020), work has begun to recommission this contract based on our learning from the past 5 and a half years and the Covid-19 response. These new arrangements will be due for further consideration by Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in the coming

months, with a view to new arrangements being in place by 1st August 2022.

Through the pandemic we also developed a Community Champions approach in Burton which helped challenge myths around Covid and increased uptake in vaccines. This was a new approach to engagement and communication effectively with local communities. We are now building on this model working with local organisations, groups, individuals and businesses on issues that they identify as important. We are also supporting the Burton Champions to access training, better networking plus access to information advice and guidance. We plan to roll out this model incrementally across Staffordshire and more broadly we want to ensure everyone can find ways to encourage and support community action.

In addition, the County Council continues to ensure funding is available to support Staffordshire's local VCSE sector and help communities recover from Covid-19. Examples include the '2021 Community Fund' and future years of the Members fund, (which sees £2,500 available per year for each local county councillor to allocate towards projects or groups) and the 'Doing Our Bit Covid-19 self-isolator grant scheme' (grants to groups that can support those who have to self-isolate because of Covid-19). Looking further to the future we will also explore additional funding opportunities to continue to help support and grow this vital part of our communities.

Cllr Pardesi asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

What is this Council's response to the former UN Special Rapporteur who recently said of our bus services that "deregulation has provided a master class in how not to run an essential public service"?

What does this Council have to say to those that the Rapporteur's report says "it found many people have lost jobs and benefits, faced barriers to healthcare, been forced to give up on education, sacrificed food and utilities and have been cut off from friends and family because of a costly, fragmented and inadequate privatised bus service that has failed them"?

Reply

I am aware of the report produced by Philip Alston, the former UN Rapporteur, where he comments on bus deregulation in Great Britain, introduced as part of the Transport Act 1985 some thirty-five years ago.

Although the setting of operational models for the provision of public transport in Great Britain is a matter for Central Government, clearly much has changed in those thirty-five years and we all need a public transport network that is fit for the future.

This Council has provided support for the local bus industry over the last difficult 18 months and is working closely with operators to help Staffordshire bus passenger figures return and hopefully exceed the pre Covid-19 figure of c15m passenger trips per year.

These bus trips help connect people to jobs, enable access to health care and education and link people to friends and family.

Supplementary Question

If privatisation of our bus services has worked, why has the Government allowed Transport for London to control and regulate the network in the capital, but has allowed public transport in other regions to fall into ruins?

Reply

You would want to ask this question of the Prime Minister rather than myself. However, the decline of the use of public transport in rural areas is a national problem and we are working with all of the bus companies in Staffordshire to see what we can do to improve customer experience and also the number of people using the bus network.

Cllr Pardesi asked the following question of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

When local companies, farmers and small businesses face a possible crisis of rising energy prices, a supply chain problem and a worker shortage, what is this Council doing to support them?

Reply

Staffordshire County Council alongside a wide range of partners including the DWP, district and borough councils, HE, FE, and private companies has put in place a wide range of business, employment and skills initiatives to support the local businesses and residents in the recovery from the pandemic. This includes challenges around energy, supply chain and worker shortage.

Much of this activity is channelled through the Staffordshire Business Helpline. This is managed as part of the Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire

Growth Hub. Staffordshire County Council is the accountable body and contributes resources to enable these to function.

In relation to energy, calls, emails and webchats come into the Business Helpline and Advisers signpost and refer businesses to the place where they will receive the most appropriate help and assistance to resolve their query. In the case of energy, they would be signposted to SBEN who would work to help them using the Low Carbon Evolution Programme - a project which provides the company with a two-day energy audit and then access to up to £20,000 of grant funding to assist in the purchase of equipment which will reduce their energy usage. The County Council provides funding to support SBEN.

Supply Chain issues have become a priority. In response the Growth Hub has agreed a partnership with the Manufacturing Growth Programme to run a pilot Supply Chain Programme which involves two workshops in October and January for up to 30 businesses in Staffordshire to look at ways to improve their supply chains, understand the importance of managing them effectively and de-risk supply chain issues through continuous improvement. 15 of these companies will also receive the opportunity of an individual supply chain audit which will include a bespoke action plan for them. A report will be created after the audits to provide intelligence to the key partner organisations of the Growth Hub on the main issues facing Staffordshire businesses and supply chains.

Further support is available through the £5 million Staffordshire Means Back to Business Scheme. This provides funding and business support to SMEs in Staffordshire – including a COVID-19 recovery grants programme, investment to fund wages for apprentices and nil cost workforce training to help businesses take on new staff and upskill their existing staff. The Growth Hub also works closely with the Universities and Colleges as well as private training providers to ensure that workforce training is discussed with local businesses at every opportunity.

Worker shortage is also supported through the countywide Redundancy Task Group and the setting up of the 'Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service.' Here, jobs and careers specialists, from local advisors right up to and including the DWP and BEIS, have come together with local public, private and FE and HE sector partners, both to support individuals at threat of redundancy into work in new emerging growth sectors, and also support businesses experiencing extreme change themselves. The group has the experience, skills and business intelligence to move at pace, mitigate redundancies and support businesses experiencing growth to recognise and take on immediately available local people with the talent and transferable skills they need to realise their potential.

In summary, the County Council, with its partners, is working hard to support business working with the challenges of energy cost, supply chain and worker shortage.

Cllr Afsar asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Local climate grants from the previous year have a positive impact on larger climate change pledges that benefit the community. What is the future of the climate change grant to aid local efforts?

Reply

I am very pleased to hear that the Climate Change Action Fund, launched last November, has had a positive impact on your local community.

The next round of the fund will be launched at the Members Autumn Event being held next month on the 8th November.

Cllr Afsar asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Almost a month has passed since the County Council held a public consultation on the future of Burton Library. What was the result of the consultation? What were the conclusions reached as a result of the consultation?

Reply

The Consultation ended on the 10th September. In total, 1161 responses have been received. Detailed analysis of the consultation responses has yet to be completed. The intention is to pull together a full report on the consultation that will be presented to Cabinet on the 15th December.

35. Petitions

(i) 20 mph Speed Limit in Leek Town Centre

Cllr Atkins presented a petition from local residents requesting the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in Leek Town Centre together with safe crossings.

(ii) Provision of Stop Signs and Road Markings at the Junctions of Crowborough Road, Horton with Lask Edge Road and Blackwood House Lane

Cllr Worthington (on behalf of Cllr Heath) presented a petition from local residents seeking the provision of "Stop" Signs and road markings in place of the current "Give Way" signs at the junctions of Crowborough Road, Horton with Lask Edge Road and Blackwood House Lane.

(iii) Improvements to the junction at Grange Lane/Eastern Ave, A5192, Lichfield

Cllr Silvester-Hall presented a petition seeking improvements to the junction at Grange Lane/Eastern Ave, A5192, Lichfield.

Chairman