

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. VCSE Capacity Building Recommission

The Cabinet have received a brief update on the current approach to VCSE capacity building (including the findings of recent engagement with key stakeholders) and have agreed proposals for investing in VCSE capacity building activity once the current arrangements end on 31st July 2022, including commissioning a new VCSE Capacity Building Framework. This investment will help to ensure the VCSE sector remains strong, sustainable, and has the stability required to continue supporting our communities to recover from the pandemic.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

2. Burton Town Deal - Proposed Library Move

Your Cabinet have considered the outcome of the public consultation on the proposal to relocate Burton Library from its current location to the Market Hall, Market Place, Burton upon Trent as part of the Burton Stronger Town Deal. The public consultation was conducted across an 8-week period, beginning on Monday 19th July 2021 and closing on Friday 10th September 2021. 77% of respondents indicated that they are opposed to the move; 74% disagree that the move will generate additional footfall in the Market Place; and c. 66% disagree that the move will safeguard the future of the Market Hall. After considering the progress against the four criteria agreed by Cabinet in August 2020 and the outcomes of the public consultation the Cabinet decided that, subject to confirmation from Government and the Town Board that a Town Fund allocation of £6,991,549, or greater, is awarded following submission of the necessary Business Case, and that the identified shortfall of £1,036,382 can be resourced from either the Town Board or other external funding; the proposal to re-locate Burton Library and consolidate other County offices into the Market Hall and Crossley House with a maximum capital investment from the County Council of £1,067,000, be agreed.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

3. Home to School Transport - Review of Temporary Vacant Seat Scheme

Following communication from government in July 2021 it was clear that the current temporary vacant seat scheme operated by the Council could not function in its current form in the medium to long term, due to a lack of suitable vehicles which would create inequalities between different parts of the county. It was therefore decided to hold a listening exercise with interested stakeholders and potential users of the scheme to understand if

there was a legal and fair solution which would allow the scheme to continue within existing available budgets. The listening exercise carried out between 31 August 2021 and 12 October 2021.

The Cabinet have also received an analysis of the legislative constraints and, based on this analysis, the Cabinet have decided that the Temporary Vacant Seat Scheme should not be reinstated, as no legal and fair solution that benefits all has been presented. The Cabinet have, however, agreed to review and consider reinstating the temporary vacant seat scheme once the availability of coaches that meet the requirements of the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) significantly improves in the Staffordshire. The Council's Transport Operations and Future Connectivity Team have also been asked to work with bus operators to see if existing bus routes can be extended/alterd so as to provide travel opportunities for some pupils impacted by the PSVAR legislation.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

4. Formal Report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman regarding SEND

The Cabinet have considered the Formal Report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to the failure to review and update a young person's EHC Plan. The LGSCO has found the complainant suffered injustice as a result of fault and therefore has issued a formal public interest report and require the report to be considered at Cabinet. The Cabinet have noted the report's findings and have agreed to implement the recommendations made as part of the investigation report.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

5. Proposed Relocation and Expansion of St Leonard's Primary School, Stafford

The Cabinet have approved the publication of a statutory proposal for the proposed relocation and expansion of St. Leonard's Primary School, Stafford, be approved. Subject to no major objection to the proposal, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Families and Communities has been authorised to implement the proposal at the end of the representation period. The proposed repurposing of the Kingston Centre will provide an opportunity, after remodelling and building work, to accommodate the relocated school. The relocation would enable the school to expand to meet the expected demand for primary school places generated by local housing development. The proposal would enable the school to increase its Published Admission Number (PAN) from 30 to 60, increasing its maximum capacity by 210 places (from 210 places (1FE) to 420 places (2FE)). The project would also provide a modern learning environment and on-site playing field for current and future families.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

6. Diversity and Inclusion – Principles, Objectives and Action Plan

The Cabinet have considered the outcome of recent work to identify how the Council can further strengthen its commitment to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across the Council and Staffordshire; and have also agreed the following Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Principles and Objectives:

- The Principles are:
 - Staffordshire is a place where there is equality of opportunity for all, regardless of circumstances.
 - Staffordshire County Council is an inclusive and diverse employer, where our people feel they have the opportunity to succeed and progress.
 - Staffordshire County Council develops and delivers services that are inclusive and accessible to all.

- The proposed Objectives are:
 - Review and strengthen our recruitment and retention processes and practices.
 - Review and strengthen our diversity and inclusion training offer to employees.
 - Strengthen our approach to engaging and collaborating with our workforce and communities on diversity and inclusion issues.
 - Raise awareness of, and celebrate, diversity.

An initial Action Plan has been developed to take forward the proposed Objectives.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

7. Chatterley Valley West - Project Update

The Cabinet have approved proposals to unlock a 43-hectare (gross) employment site at Chatterley Valley which could generate around 1,700 jobs (depending on the nature of the end users), Gross Value-Added Benefits of £67 million per annum and £60 million of private sector

investment. The investment by the County Council is conditional on agreeing a Business Rates agreement with the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to secure payback of the investment at the earliest opportunity.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

8. Families Health & Wellbeing (0-19) Service: Contract Extension

The Cabinet have approved proposals to extend the contract for the Families Health and Wellbeing (0-19) service with MPFT from April 2023 – March 2024. The service enables children, young people and families to access information, advice and support from Health Visitors and School Nurses. Funding is available for the extension period as part of the Public Health Ring Fenced Grant.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

9. IA2609 Framework for Responsive Property Maintenance and Day Works

The Cabinet have approved proposals for the procurement of a framework agreement for the provision of Responsive Property Maintenance and Dayworks. The Framework Agreement will be for a period of 3 years starting 1st June 2022 to 31st May 2025 with the option to extend by 1 x 12-month period. The Framework Agreement is being procured to provide the Council with an agreed schedule of rates for maintenance and minor works for Council owned buildings. The Framework Agreement can also be accessed by public sector partners including schools.

(Cabinet – 15 December 2021)

10. Staffordshire Means Back to Business - Oral Update

The Cabinet have received an update on “Staffordshire Means Back to Business” activity and noted the following matters:

- The challenges faced by businesses due to Covid, compounded by the emergence of the Omicron variant, and the help available to them via the Growth Hub and the Council’s own Back to Business web pages.
- The rise in the overall number of job vacancies and new employment generating developments in the County, such as ASOS in Lichfield (2,000 jobs) and Pets at Home in Stafford (800 jobs).
- The on-going negotiations to deliver investment deals at the i54 Extension, and the commencement of work at Chatterley Valley, which could provide in excess of a further 3,000 jobs.

- The groups who have been disproportionately impacted by Covid 19, namely young people, women, the lower paid; with the proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that were claiming work-related Universal Credit currently standing at 4.9% compared to 3.7% in March 2020 and still well above the rate for the working age population.
- The most recent data available for overall government support packages following the ending of the 'furlough' scheme showed that 2% less of Staffordshire's residents were on a Government supported scheme than nationally.
- The Staffordshire Means Back to Business programme was continuing to support local businesses and those who wished to start their own. This programme had only been in operation for 12 months and to date had secured:
 - 290 Apprenticeships supported
 - 250 Companies supported with free training to help them with Covid restrictions
 - 297 students registered on the online Ignite Learning Platform to become business entrepreneurs in their own right
 - 7,000 students received Ignite lesson plan
 - 14 Business start-up loans made
 - 320 people through the Business Start Up Programme
- The Council's Skills and Employability team were leading on the delivery of 4 skills projects funded by the SSLEP's Getting Building Fund at Cannock, Tamworth, JCB Academy in Rocester and Stoke-on-Trent.

(Cabinet – 19 January 2022)

11. Economic Recovery & Growth: Enhancing Delivery

From 2021/22 onwards, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) includes an additional £1million per annum to support economic recovery and encourage economic growth. Of the additional resources made available in 2021/22, £0.840m of this £1m investment had been formally committed as follows:

- (i) £0.200m had been used to create a Destination Management Partnership (DMP) post and to create a DMP marketing budget.
- (ii) £0.640m had provided the ability to develop and operate the Staffordshire Means Back to Business scheme. To date the scheme had been able to generate an investment fund of over

£6m which included a successful bid to the Community Renewal Fund (CRF) of £751,000. As a result of the successful CRF bid, the allocation of £0.64m in County Council resources will not be spent in year but it is planned to utilise this in future years.

The Cabinet noted that the Council's Economic Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy would be refreshed in the next few months to reflect the changing impact of Covid on our economy, and the priorities set out in the Strategic Plan. Over the next four years, future growth and investment will be driven by the following Business Economy and Skills priorities:

- (i) Supporting the regeneration and transformation of our town centres.
- (ii) Enabling infrastructure for economic growth through ready to fund projects.
- (iii) Developing and implementing programmes which will make Staffordshire one of the best places to start-up or step up in business.
- (iv) Having a high skilled, better paid workforce.
- (v) A50/A500 Strategic Investment Corridor, realising opportunities it presents through innovative and sustainable growth.
- (vi) Activities to be underpinned by the drive for Net Zero Carbon.

Authority has been delegated to the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills, to move resources between the above activities as required to meet changing requirements (within the budget envelope).

(Cabinet – 19 January 2022)

12. Establishment of the Staffordshire Leaders Board

The Cabinet have approved proposals for the establishment of, and the County Council's participation in, the Staffordshire Leaders Board, the purpose of which will be to continue to improve joint working between the County, District and Borough Councils in Staffordshire, and to develop and negotiate a County Deal with Government. The proposals will allow the County and District/Borough Councils in Staffordshire to build on their strengths by focusing on joint approaches to the big issues that affect us, including the economy, public health and reducing carbon emissions.

It will also create an official structure by which Staffordshire's democratic organisations can speak jointly to central Government on how we can deliver better health and prosperity to the county.

The Leader of the Council has been appointed as the County Council's representative on the Leaders Board.

(Cabinet – 19 January 2022)

14. Future Commissioning Arrangements for Supported Living Services in Staffordshire

The Cabinet have considered options and proposals for future commissioning arrangements for Supported Living services in Staffordshire. The Council currently funds Supported Living for 416 people (373 in county and 43 out of county) with 53 care and support providers at a total gross annual cost of £23.3 million. A range of options for future commissioning arrangements for Supported Living have been developed through conversations between commissioners and providers and research on the arrangements used by other Local Authorities. The Cabinet have approved engagement with stakeholders to discuss the options and proposals. Feedback from this engagement will be used to refine the options appraisal and develop recommendations for future commissioning arrangements for Supported Living services in Staffordshire, with these recommendations brought to a future Cabinet meeting for approval.

Cabinet has also agreed an extension of the current Supported Living contracts for one year to allow sufficient time to discuss the options with stakeholders and to develop recommendations on a preferred option.

(Cabinet – 19 January 2022)

14. 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 noted the following matters:

- With the Omicron variant spreading fast, Covid infections in Staffordshire were at very high levels, with cases in all age groups. This was causing substantial pressure on health and care services due to Covid related hospitalisations on top of usual seasonal illness, as well as staff absences on top of long-term recruitment and retention difficulties.
- Vaccination remained the best way to reduce complications and deaths from Covid and was even more important in the face of the Omicron variant. The intention nationally was to offer all adults a booster as well as children over 12 two doses by the end of January 2022. The Council would continue to support the NHS to accelerate the vaccination programme.

- HM Government had announced a 3-month extension of Targeted Community Testing (TCT) until 31 March 2022 to support the holistic test, trace, isolate and vaccinate approach required for Winter Plan B and Omicron response. In Staffordshire, TCT had been provided by Nexxus Trading Services Ltd (Nexxus) who had the experience, skills, and infrastructure to be able to continue to provide TCT effectively. It was therefore agreed that the contract with Nexxus should be extended until 31st March 2022.
- Care providers had been particularly hard hit by the pandemic and had faced challenges to maintain enhanced standards of infection prevention and control, test clients and staff, and in recent months to recruit and retain their workforce. Government had provided a series of one-off grants to support care providers, which had been distributed via local authorities. On 17 and 29 December 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) announced two further grants and had asked local authorities to use both grants as quickly as possible. Funding could be given to providers to support their own initiatives or spent by local authorities on schemes to help all providers. Both grants must be used by 31 March 2022, with any unused funds returned to DHSC.
- Under the Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund Round 2, the Council was to receive a total of £4,427,456 in two instalments in January 2022 and February 2022. The funding was contingent on submitting an assurance statement to DHSC by 21 January 2022. The purpose of the grant was to recruit and retain sufficient staff over winter, and support growth and sustain existing workforce capacity.
- Details of the Infection and Prevention Control Fund further round had not yet been published by DHSC. Funding totals £60m in England with Staffordshire's allocation expected to be c£900k. Grant conditions were expected to be similar to previous rounds of funding. Proposals for the expenditure of these grants were consistent with grant conditions and were a combination of funding to providers and schemes delivered by the Council. The proposals were largely an extension of allocations under the Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund Round 1 and Infection and Prevention Control Fund previous rounds.

(Cabinet – 19 January 2022)

15. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and Commonwealth Games

In spring and summer 2022 we will celebrate two momentous events that promise to bring communities and people together across Staffordshire and the West Midlands.

Firstly, we mark The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in May and June, to mark her incredible 75-year reign and the contribution she has made to our country. I hope that by then we will be in a position to see events and street parties across Staffordshire, and the opportunity for people to come together and celebrate after two hugely difficult years. Look out for more information and advice in the coming weeks.

This summer we also welcome the Commonwealth Games to Birmingham, and will be hosting two events right here in the county: mountain biking on Cannock Chase and part of the road cycling time trials in South Staffordshire.

There are lots of opportunities for Staffordshire people to get involved, whether as spectators or volunteers, and nominations are currently open for inspirational friends or colleagues to take part in the Queen's Baton Relay. The closing date is 14th February, so I urge people to go to Birmingham2022.com to find out more.

16. National Apprenticeship Week and skills

It is National Apprenticeship Week (7-13th February), celebrating the brilliant impact apprenticeships make to people, businesses and the wider economy.

Here in Staffordshire, it is vital we have a good supply of talented workers, with the skills that our employers need, to grow our economy. Apprenticeships are key to this and for apprentices, it's a great way of kickstarting or improving their careers.

The county council is running the 'Now's your time to recruit an apprentice for less' campaign. We are making up to £5,000 available to small businesses towards the cost of taking on an apprentice, and more than 160 businesses have already applied.

Up skilling your workforce to make sure that your business has the skill-base it needs for the future is no longer a nice to have, it's essential. One of the best ways of future-proofing your business is by taking on an apprentice and through our fund we can help you.

17. Director of Public Health Report

The real and devastating impact of Covid-19 on healthcare, businesses and communities across Staffordshire was detailed in our annual report from Dr Richard Harling.

Published to coincide with the 2nd anniversary of the first UK covid cases, the report sets out the incredible efforts of county council staff, working with partners across the public, healthcare, and private sectors. They include the handing out of 7 million items of PPE, more than 2 million lateral flow tests and dealing with more than 5,000 incidents and outbreaks.

I have been incredibly proud of the response in Staffordshire, supporting our residents through the most challenging two years. We are not out of the woods yet, with new Covid-19 variants appearing all the time. However, we are in a good position to tackle these head-on, with the partnerships and ways of working we have developed during this pandemic.

18. Climate Change

The new Strategic Plan before members today sets out the increasing scale of work we are doing, often with partners, to make Staffordshire sustainable, and combat climate change.

We are planting trees to mark The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, offering grants to community groups for environmental projects, running campaigns to increase recycling and reduce food waste, and much, much more.

We are facing a climate crisis and we must all do our bit to slow and reverse the effects of climate change, and chart our way to a carbon neutral future. Small steps make a big difference, from walking or cycling instead of hopping in the car for short journeys, or buying a reusable drinks bottle to cut your use of plastic. And while these measures are better for the environment, they bring health and financial benefits too.

So if it is not too late for another resolution this year, make it one to do your bit to help make Staffordshire sustainable.