

## **Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 16 March 2022**

### **Economic Strategy**



**Cllr Philip White, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills said,**

“The impacts of the COVID-19 public health crisis continue to be felt on the local, national and global economies. However, the support measures delivered throughout the pandemic by the County Council, Government, and our partners, alongside the hugely successful vaccine rollout, have resulted in us being in a far better position now than even the most optimistic of commentators thought we would be at the start of the pandemic.

Despite the impacts of the pandemic, we remain ambitious for Staffordshire’s recovery and growth. Our aim remains that Staffordshire will still be on the national and international business map for the benefit of local people and our businesses. We will still be one of the best performing counties in the country with our businesses highly productive and our residents earning good money through more and better jobs. That has not changed.

The role of the County Council is central to supporting everyone during these changing times, and indeed the recovery and growth of our economy is already underway. As well as continuing to invest in the conditions all businesses need to thrive, we now can set out those priorities that we will focus on in the coming months and years, delivering on those issues that matter most to the people of Staffordshire.

Our ambitious Economic Strategy is our roadmap to supporting a vibrant, productive local economy where our existing business are helped to grow, new businesses are established and thrive, our residents have the skills needed to access the jobs of the future and supporting the creation of places across all parts of the County that we can be proud of.”

#### **Report Summary:**

Our Economic Strategy outlines the County Council’s vision, ambitions, and priorities for the Staffordshire economy over the coming years, aligned to our recently agreed Strategic Plan. Our work to support the growth of the Staffordshire economy over the last decade has ensured that we have

remained resilient, whilst the successful delivery of our Economic Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy through the pandemic means we are now able to accelerate our plans.

We will of course strive to take full advantage of the many opportunities to support the development of the local economy, but we also recognise that there are challenges to address. Of main concern are our five primary ambitions to reimagine and regenerate our town centres, support start-up and scale-up businesses, enable a higher skilled and higher paid workforce, develop investment ready projects and strategic corridors. This is not to say that other challenges do not exist, but these are the main issues we want to tackle as being of most benefit to the future of the local economy and to ensure we are delivering upon those issues our residents want to see addressed.

The timescales for the Strategy are up to 2030 to align with Government's missions for Levelling Up the UK, as set out in the recently released Levelling Up White Paper (LUWP). Whilst the LUWP has provided clarity on some key issues and new policy announcements, further detail will be forthcoming, and we will therefore keep the Strategy under review to consider any issues and opportunities that arise as and when necessary.

Our proposal is to undertake a 4-week public consultation to provide the opportunity for partners, local stakeholders, residents, and businesses to help shape the Strategy. A final designed version will be published following any necessary changes being made and agreed with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills and Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills. A summary version will also be produced, highlighting key aspects of the Strategy to sit alongside our Investment Prospectus.

## **Recommendations**

I recommend that:

- a. Cabinet approves the Consultation Draft of the Economic Strategy.
- b. Cabinet agrees to conduct a 4-week public consultation, seeking views from stakeholders, businesses, and residents on the draft Economic Strategy.
- c. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills take the draft Economic Strategy to the next available Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee for consideration and input.

- d. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills and Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills be authorised to agree changes and finalise the Economic Strategy based on feedback received from the public consultation, Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee and in response to Government policy announcements including the Levelling Up White Paper.
- e. Working with those Cabinet members with associated responsibilities, the Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills be authorised to progress the development of supporting delivery plans, working with our partners as appropriate.



<b>Local Members Interest</b>
N/A

## **Cabinet – Wednesday 16 March 2022**

### **Economic Strategy**

#### **Recommendations of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills**

I recommend that:

- a. Cabinet approves the Consultation Draft of the Economic Strategy.
- b. Cabinet agrees to conduct a 4-week public consultation, seeking views from stakeholders, businesses, and residents on the draft Economic Strategy.
- c. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills take the draft Economic Strategy to the next available Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee for consideration and input.
- d. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills and Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills be authorised to agree changes and finalise the Economic Strategy based on feedback received from the public consultation, Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee and in response to Government policy announcements including the Levelling Up White Paper.
- e. Working with those Cabinet members with associated responsibilities, the Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills be authorised to progress the development of supporting delivery plans, working with our partners as appropriate.

#### **Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills**

##### **Reasons for Recommendations:**

##### **Background**

1. Our Economic Recovery, Renewal & Transformation Strategy was developed and agreed by Cabinet early in the COVID-19 crisis (June 2020), setting out our immediate response to support Staffordshire's businesses whilst also taking advantage of opportunities presented by the pandemic to support our plans for the renewal and long-term transformation of the local economy. The ultimate impacts of the

pandemic were always and remain somewhat uncertain, although what is clear is that the delivery of local and national support measures, alongside the vaccine rollout, have been hugely successful in averting the severe economic downturn that had been predicted by many. We are now currently in a very different position to what many economic commentators thought we might be.

2. The much changed and more positive economic outlook means it is now a pertinent time to develop our new Economic Strategy, aligned to the relevant priorities agreed through the refresh of our Strategic Plan and cognisant of emerging national policy. The Strategy outlines how we will continue to support the Staffordshire economy to recover from the crisis and address some of the key challenges that we face that will provide the maximum benefit to the local economy and our residents.
3. It is essential the County Council has its own Strategy to complement and respond to national policy. We are uniquely placed to support a whole-system approach to continuing recovery and growth of our economy, due to our responsibilities for transport, infrastructure, environment, education, skills, and health.
4. The development of this Strategy will not only ensure our interventions are targeted on the right priorities, but it will also allow us to influence/shape the approach taken by the Midlands Engine, Government, and numerous other relevant bodies. It will aid with securing funding and powers to deliver our overall ambitions, including through the various Government policy agendas.
5. By outlining the County Council's priorities for the economy in the coming years, the Strategy will also guide any future work and discussions with our partners and Government on opportunities for further devolution to the local area. Any County Deal agreed with Government has the potential to provide further powers and resources that will allow us to deliver our economic priorities more quickly and effectively and is being considered through the Staffordshire Leaders Board.

## **Approach**

6. The primary focus of our Economic Strategy are the overarching priorities agreed through the development of our Strategic Plan, namely town centres, start-ups & step-ups, higher skilled & higher paid workforce, the development of investment ready projects and strategic corridors. There are several other priorities and themes that are identified as important in supporting the future growth of the Staffordshire economy including innovation, supporting businesses on their journey to net zero,

maximising the use of our investment, unlocking external funding and supporting our Rural Economy to thrive.

7. We will of course strive to take full advantage of the many opportunities to support the development of the local economy, but these priorities represent those key challenges to face. This is not to say that other challenges do not exist, but these are the main issues we want to tackle as being of most benefit to the future of the local economy and to ensure we are delivering upon those issues our residents most want to see addressed.
8. A significant amount of evidence continues to be compiled on the local economic picture, primarily through the County Council's Economic Bulletin. Along with additional evidence produced by economic 'think-tanks' and alike, this locally produced evidence has underpinned the development of the Strategy and will continue to form the basis of our supporting plans and strategies in the future.
9. We recognise that the County Council does not operate in isolation and there are numerous stakeholders with a vital role in supporting the growth of the Staffordshire economy, most notably our District and Borough Councils. We will therefore ensure that we are continuing to engage proactively with our Districts and Boroughs, businesses, residents, and partner organisations to provide an opportunity to help shape the final Strategy.

## **Delivery**

10. Achieving our vision and ambitions set out within the Economic Strategy will require the delivery of appropriate projects and programmes, set out within existing and future supporting delivery plans. Many of these projects and programmes will require us to continue the strong joint working with local stakeholders and enhanced two-tier working that has proven so successful in recent years, including the delivery of the i54 South Staffordshire Enterprise Zone and recent completion of the Stafford Western Access Route to name just two examples of many. We recognise that the priorities we have set will require large scale investment, however the County Council alone does not have the level of resources that will be needed to deliver our ambitions in full. We will therefore continue to work with our partners, including Government, to unlock external funding for delivery in Staffordshire.
11. As detailed within the Strategy, the County Council will therefore 'Lead' on direct delivery, 'Collaborate' on delivery with partners and stakeholders, and 'Advocate' for the delivery of projects and programmes by other organisations that meet our own ambitions as appropriate.

12. In January 2022, Cabinet agreed to the continued investment of £1m per annum in each of the next five years to expedite the delivery of our economic priorities. This funding is in addition to further resources in the current year to support local businesses during the pandemic and will be focused upon the delivery of the priorities set out within our Economic Strategy. We are therefore committing substantial resources to achieving our vision and ambitions for the local economy over the coming years.
13. The County Council does of course have several strategic priorities given our broad range of responsibilities, in addition to supporting the local economy. Any further investment by the County Council will therefore need to be considered against all our priorities as set out within our Strategic Plan. We will of course also need to ensure that the use of County Council resources achieves the maximum possible benefits in the delivery of the Strategy, including leveraging funding from other organisations and the private sector.
14. We will continue to manage and monitor our progress in the delivery of the Strategy through our existing governance arrangements, including regular Cabinet updates and quarterly reporting to and consideration by the Prosperous Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

### **Legal Implications**

15. At this stage in the development of the Strategy there are no specific legal implications to consider.

### **Resource and Value for Money Implications**

16. There are no financial implications identified within the Strategy. Resource will be needed to deliver the Strategy, and this will therefore be considered as a part of the development of the associated delivery plan(s).

### **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Consultation Draft of the Economic Strategy

### **Contact Details**

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