

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Highways and Transport Capital Programme 2022/23

The Cabinet have approved the Highways and Transport capital investment proposals for 2022/23.

Whilst day to day operational costs such as emergency repairs, street lighting, grass cutting and winter maintenance, are funded through an annual revenue allocation (£12.8m indicative for 22/23), the Highway Maintenance block capital grant helps fund the replacement of life expired highway assets. The confirmed grant for 2022/23 is £25.067M (including the pothole fund), i.e. the same as 2021/22, but £8.735m less than the amount received in 2020/21. The grant for Integrated Transport improvements during 2022/23 is confirmed as £3.449m, again in line with 2021/22.

Additional capital funding for Highways and Transport comes from the County Council's own investment decisions, contributions from developers through S106 agreements, other stakeholders and other bid applications. Over the last 12 years the County Council has provided more than £80M of additional investment to support highway maintenance activities, including £5M per year in the six years 2017/18 to 2021/22 and additional revenue funding of £929,000 in 2020/21 from Reserves.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2022)

2. Economic Strategy

The Cabinet have approved arrangements to conduct a 4-week public consultation, seeking views from stakeholders, businesses, and residents on the Council's draft Economic Strategy. The Strategy underpins how the county council will help to steer Staffordshire's continued growth post pandemic, building on our strengths and successes and supporting our ambitions over the next eight years.

It is a priority to us to ensure our communities have more opportunities through higher paid, higher skilled jobs. For us to achieve that goal we will lead on attracting major investment to the county – something we have demonstrated through delivery of projects like i54 South Staffordshire and the Stafford Western Access Route.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2022)

3. Agreement for Mental Health Act (Section 117) Aftercare needs

Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 places a joint duty on the Council and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to provide aftercare for people discharged from hospitals after being sectioned for treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983. The Cabinet have approved that the Council enters into an agreement with Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups under Section 256 of the Health and Care Act 2006 related to a new funding arrangement for provision of aftercare services. Under the proposed new arrangements, the funding of Section 117 aftercare services will be a 50:50 split between the Council and Staffordshire CCGs. This will reduce bureaucracy, free up staff time, reduce delays in the provision of aftercare. The services received by individuals would be unaffected.

The proposed new funding arrangements would create an annual saving for the Council of £4m compared to the current overall share of funding, and a cost pressure to the CCGs to the same value. The Cabinet have therefore also agreed that a transitional funding agreement be negotiated for the period 2022-24 in order to ensure that this new funding arrangement is affordable for the Clinical Commissioning Groups.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2022)

4. Capital Programme for Schools 2022/23

The Cabinet have approved the Capital Programme for Schools for 2022/23 which will see a proposed investment of £35.5 million into ensuring the County's 400+ schools are fit for the future.

Condition surveys of schools are conducted on a 3-year rolling programme to assess the condition of the buildings. This information is held in a database which identifies the most urgent categories of need. Every school has been provided with an Asset Management Plan (AMP) on which local decisions on capital projects can be made. Staffordshire's Schools Asset Management Plan (AMP) and Statement of Priorities (StOP) ensure that capital spending is clearly aligned to corporate priorities and delivers value for money.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2022)

5. Children's Homes Block Contract

Sir Martin Narey's report of residential care highlighted the need for local authorities to work collaborate regionally with other authorities where possible and to consider block contracts to help manage the market by using the Local Authority's collective buying power.

The Cabinet have approved proposals for a children's home block contract for 13 beds with an option to extend for a further 26 beds as part of a joint contract led by Dudley. Entering a joint agreement with other councils and providers enables us to guarantee regular good-quality provision of care at a known price and remove some of the uncertainty caused when demand, on occasion, exceeds supply.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2022)

6. Local Bus Concessionary Payment - Final Covid 19 Support Package

The bus industry has still not recovered from the effects of the pandemic and central Government subsidy is essential for services to be maintained in Staffordshire at the moment. The Cabinet have therefore approved proposals for concessionary travel reimbursement to local bus operators to be maintained beyond March 2022 for a period of 6 months in line with the extension of government funding, to help stabilise the network and allow for patronage levels to be rebuilt.

Transport Operations and Future Connectivity Team are also being asked to develop a transition plan for concessionary reimbursement from October 2022 onwards.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2022)

7. Staffordshire Means Back to Business

The Cabinet have received an oral report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills giving an update on "Staffordshire Means Back to Business" activity including the following matters:

- The challenges our businesses and citizens are currently facing due to Global pressures on commodity prices and, the County Council's responsibility to focus on the things we can do either alone or with partners that will make a positive difference for jobs, incomes and the vitality of our businesses.
- The recent launch of the Staffordshire Investment Prospectus, as part of our We Are Staffordshire brand activity, which, for the first time, brings all the priority investment opportunities across the county, into a single document. This document clearly articulates many opportunities and reinforces what a great place our County is. Highlights include:

- i. Through the Future High Streets and Town Deal Programmes, we have over £130Million of planned investment for our towns
 - ii. We have 96.4% coverage of superfast broadband and have an ambition to be a county with access to 100% Gigabit connectivity by 2030
 - iii. We have unrivalled connectivity being at the heart of the country which will only get better with the arrival of HS2
 - iv. We are home to the UKs biggest theme park, the brewing capital of the world and the national football team.
 - v. Since 2011 we have seen a 50% rise in adults with Level 4+ qualifications
- The major employment sites at Chatterley Valley and the West Midlands Interchange in South Staffordshire
 - The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit has increased slightly and now stands at 4.3%, or 35 people.
 - Staffordshire saw vacancies increase by 28% between February and March equivalent to over 4,200 more job vacancies.
 - Despite this slight rise in young people claimants, our overall claimant rate remains static at 3.1% of the working age population in January compared to 5.4% regionally and 4.4% nationally
 - The enormous scale and quality of our tourism and visitor economy in Staffordshire, which contributes over £1.8bn to our economy and includes some of the UK's biggest attractions such as Alton Towers, Drayton Manor, The National Memorial Arboretum and a large part of the Peak District to name but a few.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2022)

8. Rural Economic Strategy - Draft for Consultation

The Cabinet have agreed to conduct a 4-week public consultation, seeking views from stakeholders, businesses, and residents, on the Council's draft Rural Economic Strategy (RES).

The Strategy is central to the county council's Strategic Plan and is a priority for our new Economic Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in March 2022. The Economic Strategy outlines the county council's vision, ambitions, and priorities for the Staffordshire economy over the coming years and its focus 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.

The RES's priorities closely reflect the aims and objectives of the Economic Strategy and will provide a specific rural focus for Staffordshire's economy, the challenges it faces and the opportunities it presents for growth and prosperity. It also links with other county-wide strategies including the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan; the Stoke and Staffordshire Skills Strategy, the county council's Climate Change Strategy, and other thematic strategies and improvement plans such as transportation and connectivity.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills and Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills have been authorised to agree changes and finalise the Rural 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.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2022)

9. Staffordshire Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan

The Cabinet have approved the new Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP) for Staffordshire. The Plan is a forward-looking document covering the next three years and sets out:

- How highways asset management, as a key enabling service, contributes to achieving strategic outcomes and delivering Staffordshire Council's strategic plan.
- Describes how we go about asset management and risk-based decision-making.
- Explains what we know about the condition of our assets both now and going forward based on various investment levels.
- Sets out our service levels in terms of what we do and what we do not, alongside an assessment of associated risks.
- Outlines our progress in implementing the recommendations contained in Well Managed Highway Infrastructure Code of Practice which provides guidance to councils regarding the management and maintenance of local roads.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2022)

10. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 4, 2021/22

The Cabinet have received an update on Quarter 4 activities for each service area: Health and Care; Families and Communities; Economy, Infrastructure and Skills; and Corporate Services.

They noted that significant progress has been made across the organisation during Quarter 4, however challenges remain in relation to capacity and demand, particularly within Health and Care and Families and Communities. There also continues to be areas of financial risk in Adult Social Care and Families and Communities.

The latest revenue forecast outturn shows a forecast saving of £4.417m (0.8%). There are a number of potential carry forward requests to be made in the Final Outturn report, if all these requests are approved this will reduce the saving to £2.503m (0.4%). This is compared to the previous forecast of a saving of £3.963m (0.7%) at Quarter 3.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2022)

11. Formal Report by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Cabinet have considered a Formal Report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to the Council's failure to fully consider a complaint about Children's social care. Due to the complaint being late the Council's decision was not to investigate the complaint but a full response to the questions raised was provided to the Complainant. The complainant escalated their complaint to the LGSCO who recommended that the Council re-considered their decision to investigate. The Council disagreed with the recommendation as it was felt that there was nothing more to add due to the age of the complaint. The LGSCO disagreed and this has resulted in the Formal Report with a recommendation to reconsider the complainant's request for the complaint to be considered under the statutory children's complaints regulations. The Ombudsman's recommendation has been accepted.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2022)

12. Framework Agreement for Demolition Services

The Council has a large property portfolio of varying age, condition and suitability. As the Council continues to innovate and develop its services in line with the Strategic Plan it needs to be able to manage its property assets effectively. Part of that management process occasionally requires the demolition of buildings to allow for the construction of new facilities for

ourselves and partners. Also, demolition of buildings on land surplus to Council requirements can increase the value when the land is disposed of ensuring the most amount of money is obtained for reinvestment in priorities.

The Cabinet have authorised officers to undertake a procurement exercise to procure a framework agreement for demolition services and have delegated authority to the Director for Corporate services to enter into the necessary arrangements once the procurement exercise is complete.

(Cabinet – 20 April 2022)

13. Summer Events

As we move towards summer, we have a number of major events to look forward to.

This will start with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee during the next Bank Holiday, closely followed by Ironman in June and then the Commonwealth Games in July.

Staffordshire is actively involved in all three with a host of events taking place to mark the jubilee, routes announced for Ironman and further details of the baton relay and cycling event for the games being finalised.

This will be a great opportunity for people to meet up with friends and family and will be an opportunity to really showcase what Staffordshire has to offer.

14. Supporting People In Their Local Communities

Partnership working is one area which continues to go from strength to strength in Staffordshire and, in particular, with our NHS colleagues.

This is key in supporting our more vulnerable and more elderly residents in their homes, rather than in hospitals or in care homes.

This year an extra £19 million has been allocated to health and social care services to help us do just that. This is on top of the £123 million Better Care Fund spent in Staffordshire.

This will help support the county's Home First Service, which helps people returning home from hospital to get back on their feet and maintain their independence.

This is not only more affordable for the county, but allows people to remain in their own homes, which is where the vast majority want to be.

15. Thousands Benefit From Extra Support

Around £5.5 million will be spent in Staffordshire this summer supporting thousands of people with their domestic bills.

With rising food and fuel costs, the Housing Support Fund will make a real difference to many people who need our help the most.

At least one third of the money will be spent on eligible families with children and at least another third is allocated to pensioners.

All care leavers will also receive a £50 e-voucher to help with food costs.

16. Helen Riley

Finally, as some of you will know, Helen Riley, our Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities is to leave the county council at the end of June.

Helen has been with the county council for 18 years and a member of our Senior Leadership Team for several of those. During this time Helen has helped reshape services in a number of areas for the benefit of Staffordshire people and will be sorely missed.

While we all fully understand Helen's reasons for retiring due to her own family care commitments, I am sure you will join me in thanking her for the huge contribution she has made to this council and wish her all the best for the future.