

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Household Support Fund

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced an extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF) Grant which will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this Summer. At least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners. Whilst the County Council is able to determine eligibility and the delivery of the HSF, it should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy, and water bills. Staffordshire is anticipated to receive £5,506,547.99 through the HSF.

The Cabinet have delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities, to decide the delivery and eligibility criteria for distribution of the HSF in Staffordshire, and to take all other subsequent decisions to ensure that this support gets to those who need it as quickly as possible. They have also agreed an extension of current commissioning arrangements with Beat the Cold and Community Foundation of Staffordshire for a further 6 months, with effect from 1st May 2022, on existing terms and conditions, to administer the Warmth Project.

(Cabinet – 18 May 2022)

2. Staffordshire Better Care Fund 2021-23

The Better Care Fund (BCF) was announced by Government in 2013, to support integration of health and adult social care. It requires Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and Local Authorities to agree a joint Plan for achieving shared outcomes using pooled and aligned budgets to fund services. Plans are required to be approved by Health and Well-being Boards and then by NHS England (NHSE).

The Cabinet have received an update on the progress of the 2021/22 Staffordshire Better Care Fund (BCF) Plan and the associated funding; and have approved the 2022/23 BCF Plan. Authority has also been delegated to the Director of Health and Care to enter into legal agreements under Section 75 of the NHS Act 2006 for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 in order to implement the respective BCF Plans.

(Cabinet – 18 May 2022)

3. 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:

- Staffordshire job brokerage "*Staffordshire Jobs and Careers*" - The objective of the scheme is to support Staffordshire residents into work through the management and delivery of free recruitment and support services to businesses; achieved through a bespoke tailored service to match and screen potential candidates. A digital '*Staffordshire Jobs & Careers*' platform will form part of the service to provide a quick and easy way to find employment and/or training opportunities. This is currently being built and will be 'soft' launched with the wider brokerage service by mid-July.
- Apprenticeship 500 - This programme was developed with our partners in response to the impact of Covid 19 on new Apprenticeships, the numbers collapsed. As a direct result of SCC's actions, with the support of partners, to date 205 businesses have taken on over 400 Apprentices.
- Ignite - This is a brand new county-wide initiative designed to encourage young people in their final year at College, to understand the basics of entrepreneurialism and enterprise. Ignite aims to invest in the innovation, energy and entrepreneurial spirit that the next generation have, to enhance their ability to help themselves through giving them the know-how they need to have more options and lead the world of work. To date over 12,000 college students across Staffordshire have received focused training to set up their own business through the Ignite programme.
- The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit has decreased further and now stands at 3.9%, or 2,505 young people which is only 90 more than the pre-pandemic level. This is reflective of the record number of job vacancies currently available across the full economy, with more young people finding employment in areas of demand to aid the recovery from the pandemic. There remain clear opportunities for more young people in a number of our priority and locally important sectors such as manufacturing, construction, logistics, health & social care and hospitality.
- This decline in young people claiming Universal Credit has contributed to an overall decline in our claimant rate which now stands at 2.8% of the working age population in May well below the regional rate of 5.0% and national rate of 3.9%.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2022)

4. Final Financial Outturn Report 2021/22

The Cabinet have received details of the final financial outturn position of the county council for 2021/22 including delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. They noted that, at the end of the 2021/22 financial year, the final revenue position showed a saving of £3.984m across portfolio budgets (0.7%). This was within the Council's Financial Health target of 2% variation on revenue budgets. The Cabinet have agreed the contribution of the underspend of £3.984m into an earmarked reserve for inflationary pressures in future years. With regard to capital outturn, this showed a total spend of £103m which represented continued investment in schools, highways and economic regeneration.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2022)

5. Corporate Delivery Plan 2022/23

The Cabinet have received an update on the development of the Corporate Delivery Plan 2022-23 which outlines the key priorities across the four directorates which will contribute to delivering against the Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26. The Plan would be closely monitored by Cabinet, the Senior Leadership Team and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee alongside the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy as part of the Integrated Performance Report, to make sure the organisation was performing and achieving what it had set out to achieve.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2022)

6. Digital Connectivity Strategy in Staffordshire

The Cabinet have approved the Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework (DISF) for Staffordshire which includes the vision for the county to achieve 100% gigabit connectivity access by 2030. To achieve this vision there are five key objectives:

- To enable and accelerate delivery of gigabit capable technologies and infrastructure to provide full access.
- To maximise the opportunities and benefits of 5G across Staffordshire.
- To enable rural and digitally isolated communities where market intervention has failed.
- To enable the growth of the digital economy in Staffordshire.
- To demonstrate the benefits of gigabit technology to businesses and communities.

Authority has been delegated to the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change, to fund digital connectivity projects and programmes that market the opportunity improved digital connectivity brings, demonstrate and test new connectivity technologies and its advantages and pilot connectivity solutions using the gainshare funding.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2022)

7. Newcastle Enterprise Centre Extension Scheme

The Cabinet have approved the acceptance of investment of circa £1,140,000 from the Newcastle Town Deal (Newcastle Borough Council) initiative to facilitate the delivery of an extension to Newcastle Enterprise Centre at Knutton. The Cabinet have also approved the investment of up to £440,000 of County Council borrowing to facilitate the delivery of the scheme. The proposed extension will create 4,500 square feet of new workshop space, and the borrowing costs will be repaid from the increased rental income generated on site and will be underwritten by the Business and Enterprise revenue budget.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2022)

8. Mobilisation of Staffordshire's Household Waste Recycling Centres

The Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's) in Staffordshire, together with the transfer station at Leek, were run and operated on behalf of the authority by Amey who were awarded a two-year emergency contract that ran until 29 March 2022 following the termination of the previous contract by mutual agreement. On 17 March 2021 Cabinet approved the insourcing of the HWRC's from 30 March 2022.

The Cabinet have received details of the work that has been completed to deliver the successful insourcing of the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) network including the TUPE transferring of circa 60 staff, deploying new systems and establishing new contractors. They also noted the need to review the current infrastructure and mobile plant across the network and invest where appropriate to maintain a modern, efficient network.

It is intended that a further report will be submitted to Cabinet in the Autumn on the HWRC network to consider a 5-year costed Maintenance Improvement Plan and reviewed and updated usage policy.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2022)

9. Staffordshire Sustainability Board – Vision and Council Commitments

The Cabinet have received an update on the formation of the Staffordshire Sustainability Board (SSB). The formation of the SSB was one of the actions in the County Council's approved Climate Change Action Plan 2 (CCAP 2), where the overarching aim of the Board is to facilitate collaborative working to enable successful transition to a Net Zero County, as defined within Staffordshire County Council's climate emergency declaration.

The SSB was formed by the Staffordshire Leaders Board and is made up of elected members from all of the councils within the geographical area of Staffordshire at County, District and Borough level. The first meeting of the SSB was in January 2022 and it was agreed that all of the councils should adopt a unified vision and that they should also commit to a fundamental pledge that identifies first, solid steps to set a strong foundation for continued positive climate action. As requested by the SSB, the Cabinet have approved the adoption of the Staffordshire Sustainability Boards – Vision and council commitments.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2022)

10 Staffordshire Leaders Board

It was great to hold the first public meeting of the Staffordshire Leader's Board in June.

This county council has a strong history of working closely with all the district and borough councils to deliver priorities and benefits for all residents and businesses in this county.

The Board allows us to build on this and talk to Government with one voice on our priorities from the Levelling Up Agenda and will set the foundations for exploring a County Deal when the time is right.

11 Ofsted Focused Inspection

Following a recent Ofsted visit, I am delighted that inspectors reported back that vulnerable children in Staffordshire continue to receive good support and protection.

This is despite the impacts of Covid-19. The main findings of the report this month show that the county council, along with partners, has continued to support the most vulnerable children and families and reduce risk effectively in the face of increased pressure on services.

Of course, there are always areas which can be improved such as caseloads and we are working to address this. The findings are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our social care teams and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all their efforts to protect Staffordshire children.

12. Holiday, Activities and Food (HAF) programme

Our summer HAF fund kicks off again next week as schools start their summer holiday.

This provides free healthy meals and access to a range of activities including swimming, for eligible children. This, together with our Housing Support Fund, is aimed at people and families already struggling with the cost-of-living increases.

Since the scheme launched in summer 2021, more than 70,000 free places have been made available, which is great news.

Eligible children include those who are in receipt of benefits related free school meals, at risk of financial exclusion or in Staffordshire County Council's care.

13. Investment in Staffordshire Roads

Maintaining and improving our roads remains a top priority for this county council and the people who live and work here. This year we have pledged to invest an extra £15.5m to bring targeted community benefits.

This is already seeing results with an extra 9,000 potholes due to be fixed and the announcement that seven key roads are to be resurfaced to bring long-term benefits.

14. Commonwealth Games

After years in the planning, the Commonwealth Games is almost with us.

The baton relay arrived in the North of Staffordshire this week and will be making its way through the county before reaching its final day here when it visits South Staffordshire and Cannock on Saturday.

The games get underway next week with Tamworth chosen as a Commonwealth Games festival site and Cannock Chase the setting for the mountain bike event the following week.

I am sure you will join me in offering best of luck messages to all those involved and especially to all the Staffordshire athletes taking part.