

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update

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:

- Increases in fuel and energy prices were continuing to present a number of challenges to the local economy and, working with our Districts and Boroughs and other partners, the Councils’ continued support for businesses locally.
- The continuation of the Council’s Staffordshire Means Business programme which had delivered assistance to hundreds of Staffordshire businesses and supported the creation of 400 new Apprenticeships.
- Proposals for the Council’s new Start Up and Step-Up Business support package aimed at helping those wanting to start and grow their own business which has a strong focus on making those businesses resilient.
- Staffordshire’s Universal Credit figures which showed that the claimant count in Staffordshire saw an increase of 200 claimants between July and August 2022, although the claimant rate remained at 2.7% of the working age population.
- The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that were claiming work-related Universal Credit currently stands at 4.0%, an increase of 120 young people.
- Despite these increases in the claimant count, during the same period, Staffordshire saw a 5% rise in job vacancies equivalent to just over 900 more job vacancies to a total of over 20,200, which is more than work related benefit claimants.
- The role of the Council’s new Job Brokerage Service to match those seeking work with the jobs Staffordshire businesses are so successful in creating.
- The agreement of terms with the Harworth Group, using County Council funding together with funding from Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council, through its Town Deal, to enable the development of the Chatterley Valley business park site.
- The new Pets at Home HQ in Stafford was nearing completion (which will generate over 800 jobs); and the exceptionally strong interest in the Council’s serviced employment land at i54.

(Cabinet – 21 September 2022)

2. Approval of Staffordshire County Council’s Community Learning Procurement Arrangements 2023 to 2027

The Community Learning Service delivers non-accredited community learning and accredited Adult Skills provision. The provision contributes to the Councils strategic priorities for economic growth and health and wellbeing. Provision is focused on meeting priority needs in Staffordshire and engages with approximately 3,000 learners each year. The Service supports and develops individuals and groups for whom formal learning may have been a barrier in the past and works with them to build confidence and realise their true potential in a competitive world. The curriculum offer establishes learning pathways to help residents develop wellbeing and confidence, and core skills such as English, maths and digital, together with opportunities to upskill and retrain in vocational areas to support their career ambitions and family aspirations.

The current Community Learning Framework Agreement is due to expire in 31 July 2023 and Cabinet have therefore approved proposals to conduct an Open tender process in line with Staffordshire County Council's Procurement Regulations and the Public Contract Regulation to put in place a Community Learning Framework, to secure a four-year Framework Agreement (2023-2027) between the appointed sub-contractors and the Council, to supply Services on an annual call-off basis.

(Cabinet – 20 July 2022)

3. Integrated Performance Report – Quarter 1, 2022/23

The Cabinet have received an update on Quarter 1 activities for each service area: Health and Care; Families and Communities; Economy, Infrastructure and Skills; and Corporate Services. They noted that significant progress had been made across the organisation during Quarter 1, however inflationary pressures across the organisation were having a significant impact. In addition, workforce capacity and recruitment, and demand challenges remained, particularly within Health and Care and Families and Communities. There also continued to be areas of financial risk in Adult Social Care and Families and Communities.

The latest revenue forecast outturn showed an overspend of £14.693m (2.76%). Following the allocation of one-off funding this reduced to an overspend of £3.643m (0.61%). Inflationary pressures were forecast to be in the region of £50-70m in the current and future years and the situation was being monitored carefully and would be updated in future quarterly reports.

The Cabinet have approved the allocation of £6m from the Contingency budget to mitigate the pressures in Children's Services and the allocation of £5.050m from the inflation reserve to mitigate pressures caused by increasing prices. They have also agreed that, further to the investment in Highways agreed in February as part of the MTFS, an additional £1m be

allocated to the service on an ongoing basis, to be funded from interest earned.

(Cabinet – 20 July 2022)

4. Treasury Management Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2022

The Cabinet have received details of the Council's investment and borrowing activity during 2021/22 including both borrowing and investment decisions taken throughout the year in the light of the interest rates and economic conditions prevailing at the time. They noted that the Council's treasury management activities were carried out prudently during the year and the policy of funding new borrowing from internal cash balances continued to generate significant savings.

As well as being prudent, the County Council's low-risk investment strategy, which focused on lending to low-risk institutions and the need for liquidity and diversification, had ensured the Council had been strategically placed to deal with market challenges arising from global events such as the Covid 19 pandemic.

(Cabinet – 20 July 2022)

5. Review of the Agreement for the provision of Adult Social Care Assessment and Case Management and Occupational Therapy in Staffordshire

Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT), and its progenitor organisations South Staffordshire and Shropshire Foundation NHS Trust and Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership Trust, have provided an assessment and case management and occupational therapy services for older people and people with physical disabilities on behalf of the Council since 2012, and for people living with mental health conditions in South Staffordshire since 2009.

The Council's current Section 75 Agreement for these services commenced on 1 April 2020, for three years, with the option to extend for a further two years.

The Cabinet have agreed that the Council should extend the current Section 75 Agreement with MPFT to 31 March 2025.

(Cabinet – 21 September 2022)

6. Contract for the Supply of Electricity and Associated Services (Call off from YPO Framework 791)

Current Energy market trading conditions are extremely volatile, prices have already increased by around 300 – 400% and there is no noticeable trend for this ceasing or reducing.

The Cabinet have given approval for the procurement direction and award for the time period 1 April 2023 until 31 March 2027 for the Electricity and Associated Services contract, by utilising the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation energy framework and their flexible purchasing model to gain the best value for the purchase of electricity, from the supplier Npower Business Solutions.

(Cabinet – 21 September 2022)

7. Multiply - National Numeracy programme

The £570m Multiply Programme aims to increase the levels of functional numeracy in the adult population across the UK. Local Authorities have the flexibility to determine what provision is needed to deliver high quality, innovative numeracy interventions that meet the needs of local people and the national aims of Multiply.

The Council has undertaken constructive engagement with local partners, including public, private and third sector organisations. There has been a positive response with a range of local organisations submitting expressions of interests and engaging in an open and competitive application process.

The Cabinet have given delegated authority to the Director of Economy, Infrastructure & Skills, in consultation, with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills, to mobilise the Multiply project, with provision to formally commence in October 2022.

(Cabinet – 21 September 2022)

8. Staying Well

As the lead on public health, we want to do everything we can to encourage people to take steps to look after their health. During this month for example, we are supporting people to quit smoking as part of Stoptober.

Getting the flu jab and covid booster as soon as you are eligible is another good way to help protect both yourself and the more vulnerable in our communities this winter.

9. Enhanced Homecare Service

Supporting people to stay well, but also to stay independent for as long as possible, not only eases the pressures on the council and the NHS in the

long run, but is also better for people too. That's why we are always looking at new ways to encourage and foster independence.

The Enhanced Homecare Service is just one example of this. The aim is to create a preventative service that helps people at risk from being admitted to hospital or a care home by offering them reablement support. The team will also offer extra care for those with more complex needs.

In Staffordshire, we are committed to shaping care not only to provide the right support where it is needed, but to attract and retain the right staff. So, if anyone is thinking about working in care, then there has never been a better time to join us in making a real difference to people's lives

10. Hearing Aid Rule Changes

It is important to this council that everyone has fair and equal access to the support they need, wherever they live in this county.

For many years this has not been the case in the north of the county, when it came to the eligibility for hearing aids. I was therefore delighted when the newly formed Integrated Care Board agreed to offer hearing aids to all people with mild hearing loss, rather than just some.

I know our own health scrutiny committee has fought hard to achieve this result and will now be working closely with the ICB to ensure the implementation of this fairer policy.

11. War in Ukraine

It has now been more than 250 days since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the human cost has been huge.

In Staffordshire, we have a proud history of welcoming those fleeing persecution and war.

It will have surprised none of us therefore, that families across Staffordshire have opened their hearts and their homes to people from Ukraine.

We now have around 400 sponsors and we are hugely grateful to the people of Staffordshire for offering their help and support.

This hasn't been without some difficulties and challenges of course, but the response from our own team and our partners in managing this has been a credit to the way in which we in Staffordshire work together well.

12. Cost of Living

The current cost of living pressures is one subject which is never out of the news headlines these days and, as a county council, we are acutely aware of the difficulties many families are facing, especially as we head into winter.

Our Household Support Fund has been key to directly helping those on low incomes, including offering shopping vouchers to eligible pensioners who receive a council tax reduction.

We have also launched our Here to Help Campaign to make it easier for people to access support and advice which may help them or someone they know.

This includes checking benefit help, advice for saving money, tips on keeping warm and staying well this winter. So please do share details which can be found at www.staffordshire.gov.uk/heretohelp