

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Staffordshire Prosperity Update

The Cabinet have noted recent developments to support the local economy including the intention to bid for an Enterprise Zone in Staffordshire; the submission of 12 applications under the Regional Growth Fund, bidding for European Regional Development Fund monies; the proposed joint agreement with Stoke-on-Trent City Council to work together to promote inward investment; and possible reforms to the Business Rates system.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2011)

2. Keele University Science and Business Park - IC5

The Keele University Science and Business Park (Keele) is a key site for Staffordshire as it has the potential to deliver the high technology, high quality jobs that will drive the future prosperity of Staffordshire. To help deliver this proposal we have been working with Keele on a proposal to construct 30,000 sq ft of new offices in a centre known as Incubator 5 (IC5). IC5 will help to support existing high tech businesses to expand their operations to create new jobs and diversify the local economy.

The Business Case for IC5 requires an investment by the Council of £6.097m and shows that, even on a worst case scenario, the investment will produce a positive return over its 50 year lifetime.

(Cabinet – 18 May 2011)

3. Staffordshire Families and Communities Update

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Assets has been authorised to write to Bob Neill MP to seek his endorsement to the following approach for aggregate mineral extraction in Staffordshire:

- (i) To set targets for the provision of sand & gravel as well as crushed rock based on an assessment of Staffordshire's needs (except where there is clear justification for needs being assessed on a wider basis);
- (ii) To encourage sustainable construction practices involving prudent use of aggregate minerals;
- (iii) To encourage increased recycling of waste to provide an alternative source of aggregate;
- (iv) To reduce the environmental impact of quarrying particularly, on those local communities situated near to quarries and the local highway network affected by quarry traffic;
- (v) To promote local sourcing of aggregate materials; and

- (vi) To achieve a reduction in carbon emissions by reducing the impact of transporting aggregate minerals.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2011)

4. Burton on Trent - Primary School Place Strategy

There is an emerging need for more primary school spaces in Burton-on-Trent. On the basis of expected population growth (and excluding growth from future housing development) 150 new Reception places will be needed from September 2013 onwards, and ultimately an additional 1,000 permanent primary school places will be needed in the town. The Cabinet have therefore approved the commencement of consultation on a series of proposals aimed at meeting the demand for school places.

A further report on this matter is to be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting in December.

(Cabinet – 18 May 2011)

5. School Organisation in Codsall and Perton

As a result of falling pupil numbers, Bilbrook CE(C) Middle School it is no longer able to guarantee the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum for its pupils. The County Council has therefore been working with the schools in the area to try and find a solution to this issue that is favoured by the schools and communities themselves. What the consultation has shown, and what is accepted by the governing body for Bilbrook CE(C) Middle School itself, is that if the three tier system in place in the area is maintained, Bilbrook CE(C) Middle School will have to close. However, there is no consensus in the area for a move to a two tier system and the Cabinet have therefore approved the commencement of the statutory consultation process on a proposal to close Bilbrook CE(C) Middle School on 31 August 2012.

(Cabinet – 18 May 2011)

6. Determination of statutory proposal to discontinue Blake Valley Technology College

The Cabinet have approved the statutory proposal to discontinue Blake Valley Technology College on 31 August 2011, to take effect only if by this date an agreement has been made under section 482(1) of the Education Act 1996 for the establishment of an Academy sponsored by Staffordshire University to replace the school.

This proposal provides a tremendous opportunity to transform the learning environment in Blake, both in terms of the access to funding for investment in the school and also the link with the University as the sponsor.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2011)

7. Staffordshire Alcohol and Drugs Strategy 2010-2015

The Cabinet have endorsed the Staffordshire Alcohol and Drugs Strategy 2010-2015 which draws together the strands of work undertaken by the County Council and its various agencies and partners into a coherent plan to be led and supported by the Substance Misuse Commissioning Team (formerly the Drug and Alcohol Action Team).

The strategy represents a positive step forward in dealing with the issues of alcohol and drugs in Staffordshire and will inform how alcohol and drug services will be commissioned in the future.

(Cabinet – 18 May 2011)

8. 2010/11 Final Financial Outturn and Performance Report

The Cabinet have received details of the updated fourth quarter/outturn performance position for 2010/11. The financial position for services at the end of 2010/11 showed a small overspend of £2.265m which equates to 0.6% of the budget.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2011)

9. High Speed Rail: Response to Consultation

The Cabinet have authorised the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to respond to the Department for Transport's consultation on High Speed Rail. The basis of the County Council's response will be that the Council welcomes and supports infrastructure improvements that would strengthen the economy both nationally and locally. However, the current proposal is seen as having a number of shortcomings in terms of its justification (over optimistic forecasts of demand, over valuation of time savings and underestimation of environmental impacts), the uncertainties surrounding its potential to achieve its objectives (at best indeterminate international evidence of wider economic benefits and rectifying regional differences) and the possibilities for more effective use of limited available finances (cheaper targeted improvements to the existing network and optimal use of available technology).

As and when the Minister makes his decision the County Council will seek to enhance and protect the economic and environmental affects of whatever decision is made.

(Cabinet – 15 June 2011)

10. Portfolio Holder Delegated Decisions

Portfolio holders have recently taken decisions in respect of the following matters:

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- The granting of a three year lease of the former Newcastle Countryside Project Offices to Regent College to enable it to continue to undertake practical tasks with its students, all of whom have learning difficulties and behavioural problems.
- (i) To postpone the proposal to close Flash CE (VC) Primary School subject to implementation of a sustainable federation that will ensure a good quality of education for all pupils and provide good quality, stable leadership;

(ii) That should the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills consider that there is evidence of detriment (or risk of detriment) to the quality of education provided for pupils at any time until the end of the 2011/12 academic year, then a Portfolio Holder Delegated Decision be sought for publication of a statutory notice to close Flash in accordance with Section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- That the School Organisation Advisory Group be abolished.
- (i) That Hillport House, a residential home for the elderly in Newcastle, is closed.

(ii) That officers bring forward detailed proposals on investment in a new specialist dementia service and flexi-housing scheme within the District of Newcastle. Potentially this would be on the grounds of the former residential home, Homestead, Newcastle.

(iii) That staff and trades unions be engaged with regard to the impact of this on the staff affected
- That the Samuel Parkes War Memorial be erected within the public highway in the village of Wiggington without a Section 50 licence required by the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1991 for a period of no longer than 12 months whilst a long term maintenance agreement is negotiated with other public bodies.
- A policy on the supply of information to the Rural Payments Agency (or any successor body) where landowners have failed to comply with their legal requirements in respect of Public Rights of Way.
- The granting of a six year Farm Business Tenancy in respect of Holding No. 50, Plardiwick

11. Forward Plan

The Cabinet have approved the Forward Plan for the period 1 July to 31 October 2011, which contains details of the decisions which the Cabinet are expected to take during that period.

12. Staffordshire Hoard

I was honoured to officially open the "Staffordshire Hoard" touring exhibition on Friday, 1 July 2011 at the Shire Hall Gallery, Stafford. The Staffordshire Hoard includes the largest collection ever discovered of Anglo-Saxon gold and silverwork. It had been buried in the Staffordshire countryside since the seventh century and unearthed in the summer of 2009.

The touring exhibition is at the Shire Hall until Saturday 24 July, before moving onto Lichfield Cathedral and Tamworth Castle.

I urge everyone to visit the exhibition, even if they have attended previous showings of the Staffordshire Hoard in Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent. The new collection contains items that have never been seen before and others which have been carefully and professionally cleaned to reveal them in their true splendour for the first time since the seventh century.

13. Growing Staffordshire's reputation on the national stage

During the early summer I met with Caroline Spelman, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I discussed with her how the county council is supporting rural farming by investing one million pounds into county farms to ensure the sustainability of our rural community. This was followed by a lengthy interview on The Politics Show regarding our support to our farming community.

I have also met with Paul Burrow, Minister of State for Care Services, to debate health reform and briefed Staffordshire MPs on all the innovative and great work delivered by our services to Staffordshire communities.

14. 2012 Olympic Torch Relay nominations

We have undertaken a very successful campaign to encourage nominations from Staffordshire to carry the Olympic Torch as part of its relay across the nation. The relay will visit the county during the early summer of 2012 and we are really hopeful that Staffordshire residents will have the honour of being selected as torch bearers. Nominations were especially sought from young people who had positively contributed to their communities or who had achieved sporting distinction.

I am informed that twice as many nominations for Staffordshire people were received than any other area in the West Midlands, so my thanks go to all those who took the time and trouble to complete and submit the nomination forms.

15. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service - Community Fire stations

In recent weeks I have had the pleasure of attending a number of official openings of the new Community Fire Stations, including Tamworth and Uttoxeter.

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The new stations, as well as providing state of the art fire fighting facilities, are designed as community hubs. They are light, airy and welcoming. Community space has been designed into the fabric of the stations and already the space is well used by local people and partner organisations.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to visit one of the new facilities, then please contact your local station as I am sure that they would welcome the chance to show you around.

P.E.B. Atkins
Leader of the Council