

## **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:

- The Council’s submission to central government, putting forward the A50-A500 Hydrogen Technologies Corridor in Staffordshire as a potential Investment Zone. (As part of the submission two key sites at Blythe Vale in Staffordshire Moorlands and Branston Locks in East Staffordshire have been included).
- The County Council’s business support programmes which have already invested over half a million pounds in start-up support programmes. The Start Up and Step-Up businesses support is one of the main priorities in the Council’s economic development strategy. As a County Council we have made a commitment to invest a minimum of £100,000 per year in Start-up and Step-up business support programmes on an on-going basis. Given that global events continue to impact the local and national economy, primarily the war in Ukraine and the related increases in fuel and energy prices which are impacting local businesses, this support has never been more important.
- The current economic climate which presents a number of challenges to the local, regional and national economies in the short-term, with the Bank of England now predicting that we will enter recession this year and remain in contraction for some time.
- The showcase of the West Midlands Interchange (WMI) project in South Staffordshire, by our investment body Make It Stoke and Staffordshire. The WMI has been approved through the national planning Development Consent Order (DCO) process, being considered as a nationally significant infrastructure project. The scheme is expected to generate over 8,000 direct jobs, and the developer states spending will support a further 8,100 indirect and induced jobs in the economy through the distribution chain. Following planning approval at a national level, our approach has been very much about working with the scheme developers to secure the best opportunities possible for our local residents and the wider community. As part of this approach, we were successful in securing up to £4.55m for recruitment and skills development activity over the life of the project.

- The inaugural WMI Employment Funding Steering Group held on the 10 November. This steering group is a decision-making body who are responsible for directing the spending of the employment fund. A WMI Employment Partnership will also be established early in the new year, which will include local public, private and education sector representatives. This partnership will help shape delivery and it will report into the Employment Fund Steering Group.
- The claimant count in Staffordshire has remained virtually unchanged over the last month, with only a very small increase of 40 claimants between September and October 2022, with the total number of claimants in the county now standing at 14,365. This is similar to the national picture, with the claimant rates for Staffordshire and England remaining unchanged at 2.7% and 3.7% of the working age population, respectively.
- The youth claimant count in Staffordshire has seen an increase of 80 to a total of 2,635 young people. The number of claimants aged 18-24 has therefore increased but been partly offset by a fall in the number of claimants from other age groups. This is the same as what has happened across England as a whole. At the moment it is not entirely clear as to why this is the case, and we will be closely monitoring the situation, but it may be due to young people leaving formal education. The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit has increased this month from 3.9% to 4.1% compared to 2.7% for the working age population and 4.7% nationally.

*(Cabinet – 19 October and 16 November 2022)*

## **2. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 2, 2022/23**

The Cabinet have noted that significant progress has been made across the organisation during Quarter 2; however inflationary pressures across the organisation continues to have an impact on delivery. In addition, workforce capacity and recruitment, and demand challenges remain, particularly within the Health and Care and Children and Families services. There also continues to be areas of financial risk in Adult Social Care and Children and Families.

The latest revenue forecast outturn shows a forecast overspend of £10.908m (1.9%), prior to additional funding for inflationary pressures being taken into account. Once this one-off funding is included and an allocation from the Inflation Reserve is assumed, the overspend reduces to £6.408m (1.1%). This is compared to an overspend of £3.643m reported at Quarter 1.

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

## **3. Nexxus Trading Services Limited – Annual Report 2021/22**

Cabinet have received the Nexxus Care (trading name of Nexxus Trading Services Limited) Annual Report 2021/22.

Nexxus Care was established as a Council owned Local Authority Trading Company to provide care for people when no other provider is available in the market. The company is also available to support the Council where it needs to respond rapidly to specific incidents such as failure of a care provider.

Nexxus Care has now been fully operational for over four years. Cabinet noted that Nexxus Care achieved good performance and continued to see growth during 2021/22. The company now has 340 staff and in 2021/22 had an annual turnover of £8.444m, £2.205m (35%) greater than the previous year. Key achievements during the year included:

- maintenance of care services during the Covid pandemic
- takeover and running of two residential care homes
- continued provision of a lateral flow device testing service; and
- digital transformation across the business.

The in-year trading profit of £18,791 has been transferred to company reserves.

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

#### **4. Final Recommendations for the Future Commissioning Arrangements for Supported Living Services in Staffordshire**

Cabinet have considered the outcome of the engagement undertaken with stakeholders for the future commissioning arrangements for Supported Living Services in Staffordshire. The feedback received has been used to develop the final recommendations for future commissioning arrangements.

Cabinet noted that the benefits of the proposed future commissioning arrangements are:

- The Council will set clear expectations about Supported Living, the capacity required, and the services expected from care providers.
- The Council will be able to develop relationships with a smaller number of care providers over a long period, which will enable investment in staff expertise and environmental adaptations.
- Stronger working relationships with District and Borough Council housing departments.
- Flexible use of staff within and between schemes to support sustainability and productivity of services.

- Strengthened quality assurance and contract management and the ability for the Council to work with care providers to develop and enhance their skills and facilities.
- Better communication between care and support providers and families.
- Opportunities to allow individuals placed out of county to be repatriated to Staffordshire where their needs could be better met locally.
- Better market control to be able to balance needs and future demands against availability of services.

Cabinet have approved the future commissioning arrangements for Supported Living Services in Staffordshire and, to enable the revised arrangements to be put in place, they have agreed an extension of the current Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for commissioning Supported Living until 30th June 2024.

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

## **5. High Needs Provision Capital Allocation Funding**

Staffordshire County Council is to receive a total of £13,287,793 High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA) funding covering financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24. The funding is to support local authorities to deliver new places and improve existing provision, within education settings, for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Cabinet have approved proposals to use the funding within Staffordshire Educational settings to:

- Increase access to mainstream placements for children and young people with high needs (who might otherwise require more specialist provision) with the development of resource bases; and
- Increase the local availability of high needs places to help reduce the requirement for out of area placements/placements at independent special schools.

They have also delegated authority to the Director for Children and Families to allocate the funding to the individual capital projects at educational settings.

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

## **6. Family Hubs in Staffordshire**

Cabinet have considered an overview of the national context for Family Hubs, an overview of some of the local context that has been explored and have endorsed an outline plan for the direction for Staffordshire.

Developing the Family Hub Networks in Staffordshire provides an opportunity to build on the Placed Based Approach that we have developed with partners over recent years. It is therefore proposed that 8 Family Hub Networks are developed aligned to the district and borough boundaries. These family hubs will facilitate district-based conversations with partners to establish the local network. The network of support will be flexible, adaptable and respond to changing needs and priorities within each district. Each local area will be supported by Family Improvement Boards who will oversee the operational delivery at a local level and agree local priorities and work programme delivered by the partnership.

This new way of working will ensure families have easy access to the services they need. It is crucial that we continue to work with children and young to ensure they feel safe within their home and the community and are able to get the right help at the right time.

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

## **7. Early Help Strategy 2022-2027**

The Cabinet have approved proposals to refresh of the Council's early Help Strategy which has been developed as a partnership to reflect our shared principles and commitment to Staffordshire children and families.

The strategy has been refreshed through our Early Help and Place-Based Approach Group, underpinning our joint commitment to delivering the Strategy. This Group are also developing the linked Delivery Plan to ensure that the Strategy is fully realised.

The strategy aligns with the national development of Early Help as recommended by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) through the Supporting Families Programme, (known locally as the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme).

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

## **8. Recommissioning Domestic Abuse Services**

The Council's existing Domestic Abuse Victim and Perpetrator Services contract will terminate at the end of September 2023. Cabinet have approved proposals for the joint commissioning, with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Staffordshire Commissioner Office, of Domestic Abuse

Victim and Perpetrator Services, funded for up to five years, with an initial three-year contract with the potential to extend for a further two years, providing continuity and sustainability for this much-needed and valuable service.

The funding from Staffordshire County Council for the recommissioned service is to be maintained at the current level of £670,450 per annum; this will be increased in line with the County Council's MTFS inflation assumptions and will therefore mean that £683,860 will be available for the start of the recommissioned Contract.

By pooling our resources with Stoke-on-Trent and the Staffordshire Commissioner's Office, we have been able to ensure services for victims and families are consistently available across the whole of Staffordshire.

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

## **9. Procurement of a Framework Agreement for the Supply and Installation of Windows and Doors**

The Cabinet have approved proposals for the procurement of a framework agreement for the Supply and Installation of Window and Doors. The Framework Agreement will be for a period of 4 years starting 15th May 2023 to 30 April 2026 with the option to extend by 1 x 12-month period.

The County Council owns a number of buildings throughout Staffordshire which require repair and renewal of windows and doors to be undertaken in order to maintain them to a safe and satisfactory standard, such as schools, corporate property, libraries etc. The Framework Agreement is being procured to provide an agreed schedule of rates for PVC-U Windows, Aluminium Doors and Ancillary Work – Non-Domestic. The Framework Agreement can also be accessed by public sector partners including schools.

*(Cabinet – 19 October 2022)*

## **10. Climate Change Action Plan and Climate Change Annual Report**

The Cabinet have received the Council's Climate Change 2022 Annual Report, which records the positive progress that has been made on the Council's target to become net carbon zero by 2050. It was noted that there had been a reduction of some 15% in carbon emissions from 2019/20 to 2020/21. This reduction was a combination of the change in methods of calculating some of the Council's emissions, the reduction in DEFRA conversion factors along with operational savings. It also noted that this significant reduction in annual emissions was unlikely to be replicated going forward and future reporting was likely to show slower progress due to the nature of the challenge before the authority.

The Cabinet also approved the Climate Change Action Plan revision 2, November 2022, which details a list of actions which will assist the Council in reaching its ambition to become net carbon zero by 2050. The plan contains activities which will be relevant until 2025 although it is proposed to review annually to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

*(Cabinet – 16 November 2022)*

## **11. Half Yearly Treasury Management Report for the Period Ended 30 September 2022**

The Cabinet have received a summary of the County Council's borrowing and investment activities during the first six months of the year. They noted that the County Council maintained a cautious approach to investments; and that the policy of using cash instead of borrowing continued to generate savings, helping reduce the average interest the County Council pays on its debt. Overall, the report demonstrated that the County investment activities were being undertaken prudently and in line with agreed strategies in a very challenging environment.

*(Cabinet – 16 November 2022)*

## **12. Here to Help**

At the county council, we are acutely aware of the pressures many Staffordshire families and businesses are facing due to the rise in the cost of living.

Together with partners and local communities, we are keen to do everything we can to signpost people to the support which is available as part of our Here to Help Campaign.

Through the Household Support Fund, we have provided practical support like supermarket vouchers to eligible pensioners and even slow cookers to families most in need in parts of Newcastle. Our libraries too are offering a warm welcome and a warm drink over the winter months.

And, as ever, it is our amazing communities, voluntary groups and faith groups who are stepping up once again. Low-cost food stores, Christmas toy collections or just a chat over a cuppa. There are still some difficult months ahead, but it is the fantastic Staffordshire spirit which is helping make all the difference.

## **13. Warmer Homes**

Another amazing Staffordshire initiative is the Warmer Homes scheme. Since 2019, we have installed more than 450 new heating solutions in over 400 eligible homes.

Improving energy efficiency has helped Staffordshire residents save over £650k in home heating bills, which will be even more vital this winter.

Over the next three years, we have a further £5.9m to install green home measures in people's homes, including solar panels, air source heat pumps, underfloor heating, loft insulation and external wall insulation.

The scheme is targeted at low-income households and those suffering fuel poverty. The good news is that people can still apply. So, if you know any families who may benefit then encourage them to find out more at [www.staffordshire.gov.uk/warmerhomes](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/warmerhomes)

#### **14. All Businesses Great and Small**

Growing the economy and helping businesses flourish, attracting new investment and promoting our tourism offer are key priorities for this county council.

This can vary from championing major infrastructure projects to supporting global names to giving fledgling businesses a helping hand to grow.

It was great therefore to see new life breathed into the Shire Hall just around the corner from this chamber.

The Shire Hall Business Centre is now open for business and last month an open day gave businesses the chance to find out more about what is on offer.

It really is great to see the Shire Hall open once again and playing a key role in helping more small businesses to thrive and grow.

#### **14. HAF**

The Holiday Activities and Food programme has not only proved a lifeline for many Staffordshire families but has also given children the opportunity to enjoy activities and experiences which otherwise may simply have been out of reach.

Since the scheme launched in summer 2021, more than 117,000 free places have been made available, with a further 12,700 places being made available this Christmas.



Dodgeball, football, paintballing, go karting, swimming, cycling, puppetry and Christmas arts & crafts are just some of the activities on offer. Not to mention a hot meal where possible.

HAF activities for families on low incomes will start on Monday 19 December and run until December 30.

## **15. 2022**

As 2022 comes to close, we have faced challenges few of us would have predicted. However, the resourcefulness and resilience shown by this county council, our partners and our communities continued to shine through.

I wanted to take the opportunity to thank everyone who has stepped up to help this year. To our own staff, including those who will be working over Christmas, to our fantastic network of carers, our band of volunteers and to you as council members for your hard work on behalf of this council and the communities we all serve.

I would like to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and peaceful New Year. I look forward to 2023 where we can continue to build on Staffordshire's success story and deliver on our ambitions for this county and the people who live and work here.