

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Adult Learning Disability Provider Services

The Cabinet have received an update on progress in respect of modernising and improving the Council's in-house adult learning disability services.

Cabinet previously approved in principle the relocation of this service from Douglas Road to Wilmott Drive alongside the Specialist Day Opportunities Service. This has not been possible because the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have indicated that:

- They would not register a learning disabilities residential replacement care service operating out of the same premises as a day opportunities service; and
- Even if the day opportunities service were moved, they would be unlikely to register a residential replacement care service with more than six beds. This would be a reduction in capacity from the current 13 registered beds and would mean that the Council would be unable to meet people's needs.

Relocation to Wilmot Drive was therefore not possible and Cabinet have therefore approved an alternative option to refurbish and redevelop the existing Douglas Road site.

The Cabinet have also approved the continued provision of the residential care service at Greenfields House in Leek, with refurbishment of the premises; and have noted the progress and revised plan to refurbish the upper building at Hawthorn House for residential care in Lichfield.

They have also requested that the need for building based care facilities for adults and children countywide be assessed and that opportunities to use the Council's land and property portfolio for developments to meet these needs be considered.

(Cabinet - 14 December 2022)

2. Homes for Ukraine

The County Council is delighted, as required by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, DLUHC, to play an essential role in supporting the integration of Ukrainian families into the communities of Staffordshire. Resettlement and Integration Support is part of this work and will see people assisted by their sponsor, the community and the partnership where needed so that they can settle here in Staffordshire. The needs of our Ukrainian guests is of paramount importance in order to

ensure that they can feel part of the community and flourish here in Staffordshire.

The Cabinet have approved proposals for the County Council, together with its partners, to develop a Resettlement Integration & Independence Support Offer (including the creation of a Resettlement Team), which will ensure that guests have access to seamless integrated support, empowering them to become independent through the development of strengths, skills and knowledge they need to ensure they are healthy, happy, safe and achieve their potential.

The Cabinet have also extended their thanks to the sponsors for the compassion and generosity they have shown in offering to sponsor a family fleeing the conflict in Ukraine and welcoming them to Staffordshire.

(Cabinet – 14 December 2022)

3. Review of Older People's Nursing Home Capacity and Demand

There are 186 care homes in Staffordshire with 6483 beds registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to provide care to people over 65. Of these 89% contract with the Council and accept Council funded placements. The Council currently funds 2083 care home placements in county and a further 384 placements out of county for people over 65.

Rising demand in the wake of the Covid pandemic as well as difficulties with recruitment and retention and rising costs due to inflation are presenting challenges to the sustainability of the care home market. These are particularly serious for homes providing nursing care for older people and especially nursing care for older people with dementia. Without intervention the sustainability of the nursing home market cannot be guaranteed.

The Cabinet have considered proposals to increase capacity and ensure access to good quality and affordable nursing care home placements when they are needed and have:

- Approved in principle, subject to a business case, the development of Bracken House in Burntwood and Meadowyrthe in Tamworth into nursing homes.
- Requested that potential sites for new nursing homes be identified and that business cases for development, including options for development and delivery, be brought to a future Cabinet meeting.

(Cabinet – 14 December 2022)

4. Delivering a Future Vision for the Countryside Estate

Staffordshire County Council owns a large countryside estate including six main country parks, a suite of local sites and three greenways, covering an area of 2,280 hectares.

The Cabinet have approved a new vision for the estate including an in-house management model that will focus on maximising the benefits of the estate to our communities and environment. The proposals include a delivery plan showing how actions will support the Council's strategic objectives. Early priorities include nature recovery work and woodland creation to support net carbon zero; greening the service – electric / HVO vehicles, charging points and promoting wider behaviour change; a Healthy Parks Programme and improved accessibility; developing the volunteering offer; an enhanced business and catering offer at main country parks; extension of pay and display to the north of the county and a Parks Promotion Plan, with improved online presence and on site visitor welcome and orientation.

(Cabinet – 14 December 2022)

5. Framework Agreements

The Cabinet approved proposals to undertake procurement exercises to procure framework agreements for:

- The supply, delivery and installation of furniture – (Corporate Office furniture, Educational Furniture and Library Furniture).
- The supply, installation, repairs and maintenance of Tarmacadam and other surfaces via an agreed schedule of rates. (The scope of the framework agreement also includes for, as a minimum, playground/surface markings, playgrounds, car parks, sports courts, pedestrian ways, traffic routes and associated fixed equipment (e.g. benches, canopies, lighting, charge points etc).

These procurement exercises help ensure the Council gets the services and the goods it needs to not only meet its requirement but also to ensure that it continues to get the best value for Staffordshire taxpayers.

With regard to the Tarmac Framework Agreement, the total procurement will be qualified for up to £6.5 million to consider flexibility in the council's spend and to accommodate any potential additional spend of public sector partners. There is an appetite from Stafford Borough Council, Cannock Chase District Council and South Staffordshire Council and Keele University to use the framework once it is live.

With regard to the Furniture Framework Agreement, the total value of the Framework Agreement will be valued up to £5 million to consider flexibility in the Council's spend and to accommodate any potential additional spend

of public sector partners. There is an appetite from Stafford Borough Council, Cannock Chase District Council and South Staffordshire Council to use the framework once it is live.

(Cabinet – 14 December 2022)

6. 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 commitment to support Staffordshire’s local business community and to continue to make representations through our MPs to encourage government to seek a fair and growth-based approach to business rates to support jobs and investment.
- The claimant count, which saw a further increase of 335 claimants over the last month, with the total number of claimants in the county now standing at 14,640. The main contribution to the overall increase in claimants this month came from those aged 25-49 years of age with this group seeing an increase of 225 claimants.
- How the Council was continuing to play a key role in the delivery of local plans across Staffordshire. These plans were vital in supporting sustainable economic growth in Staffordshire, not least through allocating land that will ultimately lead to the creation of new homes and jobs.
- The economic growth programme through which the Council, working with partners, continued to support and directly deliver sites such as the Chatterley Valley enterprise zone, Redhill and i54.
- The Council’s intention to contribute to a piece of work to further consider the need and potential location for large scale strategic employment sites across the West Midlands region.
- Innovation activity within the county had increased substantially in recent years and particularly within our universities. Work was already ongoing on a number of further innovation projects within the county, including as part of the Hydrogen Technologies Valley proposal. Working with our district and borough partners through the Leaders Board, the Council was also beginning to consider further projects that could drive innovation activity across the county.

(Cabinet – 18 January 2023)

7. Health and Care Winter Update

The Cabinet have received an update on pressures facing the NHS this winter and the additional and ongoing services commissioned by the Council to facilitate timely hospital discharges and support those residents who need adult social care.

They were informed that Staffordshire has fully integrated hospital discharge services provided and co-ordinated by Midlands Partnership NHS Trust. People who need reablement and/or assessment for ongoing care and support are discharged from NHS acute hospitals to a range of urgent care services: Home First, NHS community hospitals and temporary care home placements. For those who need longer term care and support and who are eligible for local authority funded services, the Council arranges either home care or a permanent care home placement. This means that very few Staffordshire residents now wait in acute hospitals for social care.

The Government has allocated £3.0m of the one-off social care discharge fund to the Council. Expenditure has been agreed with the NHS as part of the Better Care Fund and will include around £854k for home care, £579k for care homes, £182k for additional assessment capacity, £414k for voluntary sector, housing, assistive technology and equipment, and £739k for measures to recruit and retain the workforce. This will further improve the timeliness of social care for people in urgent care services.

The Cabinet also noted that the Council continues its programme of improvement in social care including to embed consistent strengths-based practice, develop additional Extra Care and nursing home capacity, and support the market to recruit and retain staff. The Authority is also supporting the NHS with winter vaccinations: 84% of over 65s have had a Covid booster and 80% have had a flu vaccination.

(Cabinet – 18 January 2023)

8. Future Social Care Workforce Strategy

The Cabinet have received an update on the development of the partnership Staffordshire Social Care Workforce Strategy, timescales for publication and the approach being taken to implement the key activities to achieve the outcomes.

They were informed that recruitment and retention of Social Care staff has been challenging for a number of years, and there are now fewer people of working-age working in any type of job, alongside a record number of vacancies in the wider economy. There are a range of issues that affect recruitment and retention: constrained funding for social care services has led to pay rates often lower than in competitor industries; the opportunities for career progression are sometimes limited, or not well understood; social care staff sometimes feel that their work is not valued.

To try and address these issues a Staffordshire Social Care Workforce Strategy has been co-produced by the Council, NHS, Local Economic Partnership, Skills for Care, local providers and other partners. The Strategy will be amended as necessary in response to current and evolving issues. The Strategy will be endorsed by individual partner organisations and then, subject to pre-publication amendments, will be published and launched in March 2023.

Plans are being developed to implement the key actions and achieve the outcomes outlined in the Strategy, along with metrics to enable progress to be monitored. These will be overseen by a 'Task Force' comprised of representative of partner organisations, with reporting to Health and Care and Children and Families Senior Leadership Teams within the Council.

The Cabinet have endorsed the Staffordshire Social Care Workforce Strategy and noted the timescales for publication and launch, and arrangements for implementation.

(Cabinet – 18 January 2023)

9. Staffordshire County Council's Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy

The Cabinet have approved the adoption of a Public Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy developed by Staffordshire County Council working with the Staffordshire District and Borough Councils.

Although the County Council will not be delivering EV infrastructure across the County, by developing this Strategy the Council is creating a framework for others to deliver. The Strategy sets the scene for why we need to act, explains the current picture and outlines the role that the Council will play as a supporter and coordinator of efforts to promote greener travel across the county. The Strategy will assist in enabling EVs to be a viable option for residents, visitors and businesses whilst helping to support the aims of the Council's Strategic Plan, through contributing towards achieving carbon net zero and improving the quality of life for residents through a reduction of noise and air quality impacts.

The Cabinet have noted that additional guidance on EV strategies may be issued by the DfT in connection with Local Transport Plans and have agreed that any minor required text changes to the Strategy be delegated to the Director for Economy, Infrastructure & Skills, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport and the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change to implement.

(Cabinet – 18 January 2023)

10. Staffordshire Sustainability Board Communications Plan 2023

The Cabinet have approved the joint Staffordshire Sustainability Board Communications Plan 2023 which has been developed with the Staffordshire Sustainability Board in conjunction with all district and borough councils to help residents to reduce their carbon emissions.

The Plan sets out a calendar of unified and consistent communications activity to be delivered throughout the year to raise awareness, deepen understanding and inspire action on climate change.

Although local Councils are only responsible for a small proportion of carbon emissions in the county, our position allows us to set an example, raise awareness and inspire people to make more sustainable choices to tackle climate change and work towards our net zero targets.

(Cabinet – 18 January 2023)

11. Winter Highways Operations

With a wintry start to the year, our army of gritters were out in force keeping the county moving and helping people get to where they needed to go.

We have one of the largest winter operations in the country and the teams are often out in sub-zero temperatures and put in the hard work before most of Staffordshire is even awake.

Our hill contractors are very much part of the team and some of you may have seen the work being done by the team in Flash, the country's highest village, as this was featured on national BBC's Countryfile programme.

As always, our thanks go to all the crews for their hard work and dedication.

12. Numeracy – It All Adds Up

Maths is just one of those subjects that many of us never quite get to grips with while at school.

The county council has secured £4.2m from the Government as part of the £570million Multiply scheme to allow people to get a fresh start with maths.

It is a three-year fully funded programme, giving people the opportunity to learn when and where they want. Courses are both online and in-person, easy to access and suited to people's needs and lifestyles.

This has ranged from helping people manage their finances as part of our Here to Help Campaign during the current cost of living difficulties, to helping parents and grandparents get to grips with modern day methods.

Anyone who has a child at school will know that even the way simple division sums are carried out have changed, so these courses really give you the ability to support your children through Key Stage one and beyond.

It is never too late to learn, and I would encourage people to find out more about the free courses on our website.

13. A50/A500 Westminster Event

Investment in the A50/A500 is key to our economic growth in Staffordshire, so it was great to see MPs and regional leaders, including our Deputy Leader Philip White, gathering to promote this in Westminster.

A 'masterplan' was launched for the A50/A500 in February 2022 outlining nine schemes that, if delivered could ease congestion along the whole route and create 12,000 jobs across the region.

The corridor is a critical east/west route for Staffordshire and the wider region, and it is a priority to us to be involved in the Midlands Connect partnership to make the case for these improvements to the Government.

This transport corridor is also set to become a national hub for the manufacture of hydrogen engines for vehicles from cars to aeroplanes, in addition to plant and machinery.

I understand that the Department for Transport was extremely impressed at the thought and the detail behind the plan, and I would like to thank MP Kate Kniveton for chairing.

14. £20m Transport Boost

There was further welcome news for the start of 2023, when it was announced that major transport projects are to receive £20 million after the county council successfully bid for funding.

The winning schemes will improve a number of major roads around the county, reduce journey times, put greener, cleaner buses on main roads, improve walking and cycling routes and reduce the impact of housing and commercial development.

The successful bids were:

- Circa £6 million at the A38/A5121 Branston Interchange, near Burton, to complete the work at junction and provide the infrastructure needed to address the impact of significant housing and business development in the local area and improve journeys for people travelling in and out of Burton.
Staffordshire County Council is adding additional money to walking and cycling schemes in the area for non-motorists to cross the A38 safely.
- More than £9 million for work at either end of the A34 between Cannock and Stafford.

In Cannock there will be walking and cycling routes to complement the planned town centre regeneration and link to the train station. In Stafford there will be the creation and maintenance of walking and cycling routes along from Radford Bank to the town centre.

- Approximately £4.2 million to introduce either the latest generation Euro VI diesels, or electric-powered buses on certain busy routes, as well as improving bus stops and changing priority at junctions.

Also welcome, was news of a successful £17.1 million bid by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to redevelop Leek town centre. This includes a substantial investment in the Nicholson Institute, which is home to Leek's library, museum and art gallery.

15. John Henderson

As you are all aware, our Chief Executive John Henderson has decided to step down from the role and I am sure you will all agree John is going to be a difficult act to follow.

The search has begun for a new Chief Executive, and I am delighted that John has agreed to stay on in his role until a new appointment is made.

This may take a number of months, so it will be great to have the continued stability, experience and passion that John brings to the Senior Leadership Team in the meantime.