

## Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 9 February 2023

### Attendance

Jak Abrahams	Philip Hudson	Mike Sutherland
Arshad Afsar	Syed Hussain	Mark Sutton
Charlotte Atkins	Graham Hutton	Stephen Sweeney
Philip Atkins, OBE	Thomas Jay	Simon Tagg
Gill Burnett	Julia Jessel	Samantha Thompson
Tina Clements	Peter Kruskonjic	Carolyn Trowbridge
Richard Cox	Tom Loughbrough-Rudd	Ross Ward
Mike Davies	Johnny McMahon	Jill Waring
Mark Deaville	Paul Northcott	Alan White
Janet Eagland	Jeremy Oates	Philip White
Ann Edgeller	Gillian Pardesi	Mike Wilcox
Keith Flunder	Ian Parry	Bernard Williams
Colin Greatorex	Jeremy Pert	David Williams
Philippa Haden	Robert Pritchard	Victoria Wilson
Gill Heath	Janice Silvester-Hall	Mark Winnington
Phil Hewitt	David Smith	Mike Worthington
Jill Hood	Paul Snape (Chairman)	Nigel Yates
Derrick Huckfield	Bob Spencer	

Apologies for absence: John Francis, Kath Perry, MBE, Jonathan Price, Conor Wileman and Ian Wilkes

### PART ONE

#### 41. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

The following Members declared an interest in accordance with Standing Order 16.5:-

Member	Minute Nos.	Interest	Reason
Mark Deaville	44 and 45	Personal	Non-Executive Director of Nexxus
Mark Winnington	44 and 45	Personal	Non-Executive Director of Nexxus

#### 42. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 8 December 2022

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 8 December 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

#### 43. Chairman's Correspondence

## **Staffordshire residents recognised in His Majesty The King's New Year's Honours**

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman extended congratulations to the following Staffordshire residents who had received honours in His Majesty The King's New Year's Honours:

- Prof Janet Mary Lord, of Barton under Needwood, Professor of Immune Cell Biology and Director of the MRC-Versus Arthritis Centre for Musculoskeletal Ageing Research at the University of Birmingham, Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for services to older people;
- Mr Jatinder Kumar Sharma OBE, of Perton, Principal of Walsall College, CBE for services to Further Education;
- Michael John Allen, of Haughton, Chairman of Haughton Parish Council, Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to the community in Staffordshire;
- Mrs Angela Mary Ham, of Lichfield, lately the head of business support services at the National Memorial Arboretum, MBE for services to national commemoration;
- Dr Atiya Kamal, of Burton upon Trent, Health Psychologist and Senior Lecturer at the School of Social Sciences at Birmingham City University, MBE for services to health psychology during Covid-19;
- Mr Elliott Albert Lancaster, of Newcastle-under-Lyme, Director of Utter Rubbish, MBE for services to youth empowerment and sustainability in Staffordshire;
- Mrs Sarah Jane Coffey, of Lichfield, executive assistant to the CEO of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, Medallist of the Order of the British Empire (BEM) for services to sport;
- Mr Albert Gordon John Dale, of Edingale, BEM for his services to the community in Edingale;
- Mr Arthur Leonard Renshaw, of Marchington, 40 years a member of the local parish council, BEM for services to the community in Draycott in the Clay.

Also honoured with an OBE was Ms Sara Williams, Chief Executive of Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce for services to the community; and with an MBE was Mrs Catherine May Nash, of Ashbourne, recently the manager of the vaccination centre at Burton's Pirelli Stadium, for services to the community of East Staffordshire.

### **By-election – Biddulph North**

The Chairman welcomed Nigel Yates to the Chamber and congratulated him on his recent election as the County Councillor representing the Biddulph North County Electoral Division.

#### **44. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/28 and 2023/24 Budget and Council Tax**

The Council received a joint report by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/28 and 2023/24 Budget and Council Tax proposals.

Cllr Alan White moved, and Cllr Philip White seconded, the recommendations contained in the report before the Council.

Councillor Parry extended his thanks to the Director of Finance and his team, Cabinet Members, the Council's Senior Leadership Team and the members of the MTFS Working Group for their support in compiling the MTFS and Budget proposals.

In presenting the report, Councillor Parry informed Members that, in line with most other local authorities, the County Council was requested to approve a 4.99 per cent council tax increase for 2023/24, comprising 2.99 per cent for general purposes and 2 per cent ringfenced for social care. This meant that the annual increase for a Band D property would be the equivalent of £1.34 a week. Despite this proposed increase, the County Council would remain in the lower quartile with regard to the Council tax levy amongst Shire Authorities.

Councillor Parry spoke about the Council's investment in Children's Services and in adult social care. He also added that since 2014, the Council's Economic Growth Programme had delivered more than 11,000 jobs; and that the additional approved investment included:

- £50 million for the repair and maintenance of roads;
- £40 million on public health projects, including diabetes-prevention, supporting good mental health in the young, and drug and alcohol addiction treatment;
- building the major road junction to Pets at Home's national distribution centre in Stafford, which would create 800 jobs; and
- the £3.1 million Chatterley Valley West employment site near Kidsgrove, which would create up to 1,700 jobs.

It was also highlighted that almost two-thirds of the budget would be spent on the provision of care for young and old, including helping around 6,600 people remain independent in their homes.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins extended her congratulations to officers for preparing a balanced budget but expressed concern about the impact the proposed increase in Council Tax would have on families on low incomes. She also spoke about the need for Central Government to reform the way in

which social care was funded and also for long-term fairer funding for Local Government.

In response to a question from Councillor Pardesi in relation to the use of new technologies, Councillor Alan White cited the case of the 75 people in Staffordshire who were using an iPad to have their health monitored in a virtual hospital ward whilst being able to remain at home.

Councillor Sutton spoke about the investment in Children's Services including SEND and the progress of the on-going transformation programme.

In response to a question from Councillor Yates as to whether the proposed budget included provision for meals for children during school holidays for those in receipt of free school meals, Councillor Alan White indicated that the funding for this came from a Government ring-fenced grant.

Councillor Philip Atkins and Councillor Hussain referred to the pressures on local government finances due to inflation, increases in interest rates and also the demand for services. Councillor Atkins also extended his thanks to the Council's staff for the work they do in supporting Staffordshire's communities.

Councillor Worthington commended Councillor Parry on the budget proposals.

Councillor David Williams referred to the Council spend on pothole repairs and the new technology being tested to tackle such issues. He also referred to increasing highway maintenance costs, such as the 30% increase in the cost of tarmac.

Councillor Deaville and Councillor Philip White highlighted the Council's investment in infrastructure, the Staffordshire economy and in creating jobs. Councillor Deaville also commended the Council's staff for the work they do including those who work tirelessly to keep the County's roads clear during adverse weather.

Councillor Wilkes and Councillor Greatorex praised the prudent way in which the Council's finances were managed and indicated that many local authorities were not in as good a position financially as was the case in Staffordshire. Councillor Wilkes also referred to the financial challenges which lay ahead and the need for Central Government to commit to longer-term and fairer funding for local councils.

Councillor Alan White concluded the debate by indicating that the County Council would continue to deliver value for money services to the people of Staffordshire.

In accordance with statutory requirements, the Chairman called for a named vote to be taken in relation to the approval of the recommendations contained in the report, the result of which was as follows:

Those Members voting in support of the recommendations:

Jak Abrahams	Philip Hudson	Mike Sutherland
Philip Atkins, OBE	Graham Hutton	Mark Sutton
Gill Burnett	Thomas Jay	Stephen Sweeney
Tina Clements	Julia Jessel	Simon Tagg
Richard Cox	Peter Kruskonjic	Samantha Thompson
Mike Davies	Tom Loughbrough-Rudd	Carolyn Trowbridge
Mark Deaville	Johnny McMahon	Ross Ward
Janet Eagland	Paul Northcott	Jill Waring
Ann Edgeller	Jeremy Oates	Alan White
Keith Flunder	Ian Parry	Philip White
Colin Greatorex	Jeremy Pert	Mike Wilcox
Philippa Haden	Robert Pritchard	Bernard Williams
Gill Heath	Janice Silvester-Hall	David Williams
Phil Hewitt	David Smith	Victoria Wilson
Jill Hood	Paul Snape	Mark Winnington
Derrick Huckfield	Bob Spencer	Mike Worthington

Those Members voting against the recommendations: Nil

Those Members abstaining from voting:

Arshad Afsar	Syed Hussain	Nigel Yates
Charlotte Atkins	Gillian Pardesi	

**Resolved** – (a) That the following be approved:

- (i) a net revenue budget of £649.663m for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 11 to the report;
- (ii) planning forecasts for 2024/25 to 2027/28 as set out in Appendix 11 to the report;
- (iii) a contingency provision of £15.000m for 2023/24;
- (iv) a net contribution from reserves of £2.108m for 2023/24;
- (v) a budget requirement of £647.555m for 2023/24;
- (vi) a council tax requirement of £432.196m for 2023/24;
- (vii) a council tax at Band D of £1,471.23 for 2023/24 which is an increase of 4.99% when compared with 2022/23. This results in council tax for each category of dwelling as set out in the table below:

<b>Category of dwelling</b>	<b>Council Tax rate £</b>
Band A	980.82
Band B	1,144.29
Band C	1,307.76
<b>Band D</b>	<b>1,471.23</b>
Band E	1,798.17
Band F	2,125.11
Band G	2,452.05
Band H	2,942.46

- (viii) that the Director of Finance be authorised to sign precept notices on the billing authorities respectively liable for the total precept payable and that each notice states the total precept payable and the council tax in relation to each category of dwelling as calculated in accordance with statutory requirements;
- (ix) the Financial Health Indicators set out in Appendix 10 to the report.

(b) That the following recommendations, which are included within the Capital and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2023/24, the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 and the Commercial Investment Strategy 2023/24 (Appendices 9a to 9c of the report) be approved:

- (i) The Minimum Revenue Policy for 2023/24 as contained within the Capital and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2023/24 in Appendix 9a to the report;
- (ii) The Prudential Indicators as set out within the Capital and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2023/24 at Appendix 9a to the report;
- (iii) The 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy, based on the 2021 CIPFA Codes (Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code), and 2018 MHCLG (now DLUHC) Guidance (on Local Government Investments and on Minimum Revenue Provision);
- (iv) The adoption of the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) 2023/24 detailed in paragraphs 63 to 109 and Annex A and Annex B of the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 (Appendix 9b to the report);
- (v) The policies on reviewing the strategy, the use of external advisors, investment management training and the use of financial derivatives as described in paragraphs 110 to 120 of the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 (Appendix 9b to the report);
- (vi) The proposed borrowing strategy for the 2023/24 financial year detailed in paragraphs 41 to 62 of the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 (Appendix 9b to the report);

- (vii) The Treasury Management Strategy recommendations will operate within the prudential limits set out in Annex C of the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 (Appendix 9b to the report) and will be reported to the Cabinet Member for Finance, with respect to decisions made for raising new long-term loans, early loan repayments and loan rescheduling;
- (viii) The Commercial Investment Strategy for 2023/24 (Appendix 9c to the report) and note the circumstances under which commercial investments can be made;
- (ix) The governance arrangements that are in place for proposing and approving commercial investments;
- (x) A maximum quantum for commercial investments of a further £20 million in 2023/24;
- (xi) A maximum limit for an individual service investment loan of £10 million in 2023/24;
- (xii) Any upwards change in the amounts of the limits specified in recommendations (x) and (xi) be delegated to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.

(c) That the Director of Finance be authorised to adjust the contingency provision to reflect any grant and local taxation changes announced in the final 2023/24 Local Government Finance Settlement.

(d) That the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the Director of Finance be authorised to challenge Cabinet, the Senior Leadership Team and services to manage and deliver the current five-year plans and to identify further cost reductions and income generation opportunities, as appropriate.

#### **45. Statement of the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council.

##### **Adult Learning Disability Provider Services**

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Charlotte Atkins concerning the need for the Council to develop more building-based facilities for adults with learning disabilities, Councillor Jessel confirmed that the Council was continuing to invest in this service area. She also spoke about the restrictions imposed by the Care Quality Commission which required new registrations for such facilities to have a maximum of six beds.

##### **Homes for Ukraine**

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Councillor Charlotte Atkins extended her thanks to the host families for their generosity in opening up their homes to those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. She did however express concern that there was no financial help available from the County Council for Ukrainian families in relation to transport costs for those residing in areas which had poor public transport links which resulted in them not being able to access services such as language classes. In response, Councillor Wilson indicated that there were around 800 Ukrainians being hosted by Staffordshire residents. She added that the Council was providing a range of services for those refugees to help them integrate into society and that English language classes were also available online. Councillor Wilson also indicated that the Cabinet had 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 would ensure that guests had access to seamless integrated support.

### **Review of Older People's Nursing Home Capacity and Demand** (Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Councillor Winnington welcomed the proposed development of Bracken House in Burntwood and Meadowyrthe in Tamworth into nursing homes and indicated that these facilities would be operated by Nexxus. In response, Councillor Jessel spoke about the huge positive impact that Nexxus had had on the provision of care services in Staffordshire.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins spoke about the need for additional, affordable nursing home care in north Staffordshire and suggested that The Mount in Leek may be suitable for such a development. In response, Councillor Jessel indicated that the Council had carried out an assessment of current nursing care provision across the County, including any proposed future developments, so as to identify any gaps in provision. This had led to the proposed development of Bracken House and Meadowyrthe into nursing homes. She also spoke about the positive impact the use of new technology had had in the care sector and how the County Council acted as a catalyst to stimulate care provision by private providers.

### **Delivering a Future Vision for the Countryside Estate** (Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Councillor Winnington spoke about the importance of the County's Country Parks and routes such as the Stafford to Newport Greenway in helping people to stay healthy, both physically and mentally. Councillor Yates also referred to the health benefits of open spaces and asked that the Council ensures that no unnecessary obstacles are placed in the way in relation to their use e.g. parking restrictions. He also asked that the County Council engage with parish and district/borough councils in the development of the

vision. In response, Councillor Alan White confirmed that the County Council worked in partnership with local councils on such matters.

Councillor Wilcox spoke about the Chasewater County Park and how the Future Vision would have a role in developing and modernising the offer there, making it more attractive to users.

Councillor Tagg also spoke about the valuable role played by the Countryside Estate with respect to biodiversity and nature recovery. Councillor Philip White added that the Estate also played an important role with regard to attracting tourists into the County.

### **Framework Agreements**

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Councillor Deaville referred to how the Framework agreements ensured value for money and best quality when procuring goods and services and that District and Borough Councils could also benefit from the arrangements put in place by the County Council. He also added that the local suppliers could bid for work under the agreements.

### **Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update**

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Councillor Hussain in relation to the increase in the claimant count for Universal Credit, Councillors Philip Atkins and Philip White indicated that there were more job vacancies than there were claimants and added that the hospitality sector in particular was finding it difficult to recruit. Councillor White also highlighted the role of the Council's Job Brokerage service which tried to match vacancies with individuals who possessed the necessary skills.

Councillor Hussain also referred to innovation and asked for examples of where this was occurring in Staffordshire. In response, Councillor Philip White spoke about the Hydrogen Technologies Valley proposal and also the work by Keele University on vaccines.

Councillor Yates referred to an issue in Biddulph where an unadopted road provided access to land earmarked for mixed use development. In response, Councillor David Williams indicated that the County Council would not adopt the road until such time as it was brought up to the necessary standards. Councillor Philip White added that he would engage with the district council to see what could be done to address this issue.

Councillor Smith referred to the potential benefits arising from HS2 including providing opportunities for apprenticeships. Councillor Philip White added that although the Council did not support the construction of HS2, it was

determined to continue to extract the maximum benefits for Staffordshire and its communities.

Councillor Afsar highlighted the need for the County Council to continue to seek a fair and growth-based approach to business rates to support jobs and investment.

### **Health and Care Winter Update**

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Councillor Edgeller referred to spending on mental health services within Staffordshire and also a letter received by Theo Clarke MP from the Health Minister confirming funding for mental health services including for the Crisis Assessment Centre at St. George's Hospital in Stafford.

Councillor Hood spoke about staff shortages at the Royal Stoke Hospital and also at St. Georges and the impact on patients. In response, Councillor Alan White indicated that he would raise Councillor Hood's concerns with the Integrated Care Board.

Councillor Huckfield commended the care provided in hospitals, nursing homes and also the provision of domiciliary care across the County.

In response to a question from Councillor Charlotte Atkins, Councillor Jessel confirmed that the allocation by Central Government of £3.0m of the one-off social care discharge fund to the Council needed to be spent by the end of March 2023. She added that she had written to the Secretary of State to say that in her view there was a better, more sustainable way of allocating such funding by allowing local councils to plan ahead.

Councillor Pardesi spoke about Central Government's under-investment in social care. In response, Councillor Jessel referred to the ongoing partnership working between the Council and the NHS to ensure that people received the care they needed.

### **Future Social Care Workforce Strategy**

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Councillor Jessel informed the council of the development of the Staffordshire Social Care Workforce Strategy which aimed to attract and retain care staff and to improve the image of the sector and make it more attractive as a career. She extended her thanks to those who had participated in the development of the Strategy which was due to be launched by the end of March.

### **Staffordshire County Council's Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy**

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Councillor Flunder, Councillor Clements and Councillor Yates welcomed the publication of the Strategy. Councillor Clements added that thought needed to be given to access to chargers by disabled drivers. Councillor Yates enquired about the rate of delivery of Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure across the eight Staffordshire Borough and District Councils. In response, Councillor Parry, Councillor Tagg and Councillor David Williams indicated that the Strategy was about enabling the private sector to provide electric vehicle charging facilities and not for the County Council to be responsible for their provision at the Council taxpayers' expense. Councillor Tagg and Councillor Flunder also spoke about the existing and planned provision in the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands Districts. Councillor Greatorex indicated that the Strategy did not contain any details regarding the target number of charging facilities across the County.

Councillor David Williams extended his thanks to Clive Thomson and his team for their work in developing the Strategy.

### **Staffordshire Sustainability Board Communications Plan 2023**

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Councillor Smith spoke about the problems, particularly amongst older people in the community, in accessing information via the internet and added that, in addition to providing training on accessing the internet, alternative methods of conveying information to Staffordshire residents needed to be considered. In response, Councillor Tagg indicated that it was not primarily an on-line campaign and that a lot of the sustainability events would be taking place in town centres. He added that environmental tips were to be included in the Council Tax leaflet being sent out to all households in Staffordshire.

### **Winter Highways Operations**

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Councillor Hussain paid tribute to the gritting crews who were keeping the County's roads clear of snow and ice over the winter period. He, together with Councillor Yates, also enquired as to how to get roads, e.g. on new housing developments, added to the routes which were routinely gritted. In response, Councillor David Williams and Councillor Alan White indicated that there was a finite capacity to the routes which could be gritted and that grit bins were provided as necessary in those areas which were not on gritting routes.

### **Numeracy – It All Adds Up**

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Councillor Hudson welcomed the Multiply scheme, a three-year fully funded programme giving people the opportunity to improve their numeracy skills. He added that the scheme was particularly important for parents with children of school age as the way in which mathematics was now taught in schools differed from the methods used twenty/thirty years ago. Councillor Philip White also welcomed the scheme and added that it was to be rolled out across the County in both a classroom environment and also on-line.

### **A50/A500 Westminster Event**

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Councillor Philip Atkins and Councillor Hudson welcomed the 'masterplan' which 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. They also spoke about how the proposed road schemes could benefit manufacturers located along the corridor such as JCB. Councillor Philip White spoke about the need to continue to lobby Central Government to ensure that the masterplan came to fruition.

### **£20m Transport Boost**

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Councillor Sutherland, Councillor Edgeller and Councillor Jessel welcomed the announcement that major transport projects were to receive £20 million after the county council successfully bid for funding and they outlined the projects which would proceed in their respective areas. Councillor Jessel also extended her thanks to the Leader, Deputy Leader and to those officers involved in the preparation and submission of the bid.

Councillor Northcott and Councillor Flunder referred to the successful £17.1 million bid by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to redevelop Leek town centre.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith concerning the maintenance of bus stops, Councillor Greatorex indicated that Parish Councils were responsible for the maintenance of bus shelters.

### **John Henderson**

(Paragraph 15 of the Statement)

Councillor Philip Atkins, Councillor Charlotte Atkins and Councillor Alan White extended their thanks to Mr Henderson for agreeing to stay on in his role as Chief Executive until his replacement is appointed. Councillor White added that there would further be opportunities for Members to pay their tributes to Mr Henderson for the contribution he had made before he leaves the Authority.

**Resolved** – That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received.

#### **46. Appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees**

On the nomination of the Leader of the Council it was:

**Resolved** – That Paul Snape be appointed as Vice-Chairman – Scrutiny on the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### **47. Questions**

Councillor Pritchard asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

##### **Question**

According to a report compiled by SunLife UK that looked at several indicators, Tamworth has been ranked the 4th safest place in England and Wales for the over 60's to live. Top in Staffordshire. The report measured consistently low, on average, burglaries, theft, ambulance waiting times and flu mortality. The same report concluded that Staffordshire is the safest county out of England and Wales for the over 60's to live. Would the Leader agree that this is very positive news and will he join me in thanking the public services involved in the indicators measured in this report?

##### **Reply**

We are delighted to see that Tamworth has been ranked the 4th safest town in England and Wales for the over 60's. Lichfield, Stafford and Newcastle-under-Lyme are also in the top 20 towns, and Staffordshire is the ranked the safest county in England. The ranking appears to be a consequence of low crime rates and low flu mortality rates among the over 60s.

Councillor Yates asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

##### **Question**

Last weekend, I submitted a highways report, through the Staffordshire County Council Portal, that had 25 separate photographs attached, together with a statement regarding the poor condition of Meadows Way (A527) as it goes through Biddulph. This report was declared invalid, as I am asked to report each pothole/defect individually. On Saturday (4th Feb) I walked the 1.6km of Meadows Way and recorded 138 potholes and defects worthy of such individual report.

My in box is full of requests to get this road "sorted"

Instead of consuming my valuable time, officers valuable time, and inspectors valuable time, can I instead have a firm, dated commitment to resurface this, our one and singular "A-Road" in Biddulph?

## **Reply**

I am pleased to confirm that the A527 principal route through Biddulph is identified in the provisional highway capital maintenance programme over the next two financial years for a combination of structural and preventative measures.

The section from the county boundary heading south to the junction with Grange Road is included in the preventative surface treatments programme this coming summer.

The next section from the Grange Road junction heading south to Tunstall Road roundabout (nr the new Aldi development) will also see surface pre-patching works during 2023, with surface treatment planned in summer 2024.

Preventative treatments are not suitable however for high stress roundabout locations. Therefore, the three roundabout junctions: Congleton Road roundabout, Wharf Road roundabout and Tunstall Road roundabout, along with their approach roads, have also been identified as high priorities for remediation subject to future funding availability.

The fourth roundabout with Tunstall Road was recently resurfaced in conjunction with the S278 highway improvements for the Aldi development.

With regards to the reporting of highway defects we do, of course, welcome reports from the public about the condition of the highway network; however, all of Staffordshire's roads are routinely assessed by a team of Highway Inspectors who identify safety defects and assign a classification for repairs based on the risk the defect poses to the travelling public.

The A527 through Biddulph is inspected on a monthly basis and any actionable defects identified at that time are assigned a classification and necessary works are raised to keep the road in a safe condition.

In addition to this the Council can receive between 3,000 to 5,000 reports a month in relation to highway matters. Visitors to our website are advised of the routine inspections which will log each individual pothole if it meets our intervention criteria at the time of the Inspector's visit.

If a customer raises an individual defect through our website or MyStaffs app, our current digital technology provides a specific reference number which is used to provide updates to the customer on the status of that particular defect's repair. Recent development work to improve this process has included the provision of photographs to assure customers that the specific defect they reported has been actioned.

A significant element of the Highways Transformation programme is to improve the customer journey and further development work will be taking place to expand the way in which defects can be reported and enhance the information available to customers.

### **Supplementary Question**

Why is it that when Amey go to do a repair they may just do one or two pothole repairs which are categorised as urgent but leave others in the immediate vicinity which are not classified as urgent? Can we look at working practices to make them more efficient?

### **Reply**

We have already started to do area work as part of our "whole place" approach. Due to current weather conditions, we can not do Category 3 repairs and sometimes, during winter conditions, we do temporary repairs as we know that any repairs will not last the season.

Councillor Afsar asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change whose reply is set out below the question:-

### **Question**

Urban Tree planting is critical for maintaining good air quality. What else can be done to plant more Trees in urban areas and do you have any district by district year to year comparative statistics on Urban tree planting in Staffordshire?

### **Reply**

A corporate Tree Management Strategy is currently under development. This will include future tree planting and maintenance programmes, which amongst other things is a key part of the council's Climate Change Action Plan.

There are already several programmes of tree planting activity taking place. Examples include:

- a. A free tree giveaway that will be taking place in the coming weeks via the Country Parks. 5000 trees will be made available to residents to plant in their gardens to encourage urban tree planting.
- b. Economic regeneration schemes also include tree planting, and over the last two years the County Council has planted over 20,000 trees through this approach.
- c. Tree planting schemes involving schools taking place in many urban areas.

District and Borough councils are engaged in their own tree planting programmes and have a key role by influencing planting in new developments through their planning functions. Recent updates to the National Planning Policy Framework mean that all new streets must now be tree-lined unless there are clear, justifiable and compelling reasons why this would be inappropriate. Opportunities are also taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in new developments, such as parks and community orchards.

Last summer Cabinet approved a new highway tree strategy, within which it is now stipulated that where any existing highway tree has to be removed it will be replaced with at least 2 large or 3 smaller new trees. Borough District and Parish Councils are also supported to plant and maintain highway trees in suitable places.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

### **Question**

How many speed cameras are there on Staffordshire roads? What percentage of them contain live working cameras capable of detecting speeding offences? How often are the working cameras switched between different locations? What criteria are used to determine which locations will have live cameras?

### **Reply**

The use of camera enforcement across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is managed through the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership, of which Staffordshire County Council is one of a number of members. Enforcement of speed cameras is the responsibility of Staffordshire Police.

Across the Staffordshire County Council area, there are 217 fixed cameras. The aim of fixed cameras, whether operational or not, is to encourage compliance with the speed limit to improve road safety. As such, the partnership does not make the status or number of individual cameras known publicly so that sites that are not in use can still provide a deterrence to speeding.

The use of fixed speed cameras has historically been prioritised based on the recent collision history of the location. This approach is currently being incorporated into an improvement programme which will consider upgrades to some older camera housings. This will increase the number of operational cameras and enable newer digital enforcement technology to be used. The improvement programme is being funded through the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership.

### **Supplementary Question**

I have residents who are fed up with heavy goods vehicles thundering past their houses where it is well known that there are safety cameras without any cameras installed in them. It is therefore imperative that cameras are regularly switched between the various safety camera locations, and I therefore reiterate my original question: "How often are the working cameras switched between different locations?"

### **Reply**

It is for the Road Safety Partnership to manage the camera locations, not the County Council. If you have concerns about a specific location, I would encourage you to contact your local Highways team with a view to them carrying out a speed count so that we can get an accurate picture of the situation.

Councillor Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question: -

### **Question**

Many gullies do not function even after cyclical cleaning and maintenance; however, replaced gullies work effectively and are proving to be a sustainable remedy. Will the council prioritise the replacement of old gullies to prevent roadsides flooding as a long-term solution?

### **Reply**

Most examples of standing water are as a result of intense periods of rainfall exceeding the design capacity of highway gullies. Most often once the intensity of the rainfall eases the ponding water is able to drain away.

However, where standing water is identified as a regular problem, investigation is needed to determine the cause. Often problems exist with other parts of the drainage system managed by third-parties – for example at the outfall or within the carrier system, but sometimes the problem can be with the highway gully chamber itself.

Where the highway gully chamber is at fault, repair or replacement is programmed in accordance with the level of priority determined by risk to public safety and/or property damage.

Highway drainage systems are routinely inspected and modernised as part of planned programme of highway capital maintenance and renewal schemes.

In recent years the council has also invested in a programme of old Victorian gully pot replacements in Burton that were known to be causing particular local problems.

If a particular gully or collection of gullies is of local concern the local member can also use their local DHP funding allocation and local leverage to help accelerate repair or replacement.

Councillor Clements asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

### **Question**

Can the Cabinet Member for Highways explain what if anything will be done about residents using sockets within their home to charge their electric vehicles which potentially means trailing cables across footpaths and highways?

### **Reply**

The County Council does not permit any cable to be placed across the public highway (even if covered or inserted into a gully); as it represents a health and safety hazard, and an impediment to the safe use of the highway by the visually and/or mobility impaired, or other affected user groups.

Under the Highways Act 1980, action may be taken to remove cables that are deemed unsuitable or unsafe. This method of on-street EV charging is therefore not considered a suitable approach for residents without off-street parking provision to charge their EV on-street.

We recognise the difficulties for people without off-street parking. To help with this, we are working alongside district and borough councils and the private sector to facilitate the development of a convenient and accessible network of charging points in Staffordshire.

This approach is set out in the Staffordshire County Council Public Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy that was approved last month by Cabinet and will be signed off by each of the Districts/Borough councils. This document sets the scene for why we need to act, explains the current picture, and outlines the role that SCC 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.

Councillor Pardesi asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question: -

### **Question**

Which job roles, formerly delivered by Staffordshire County Council, are now undertaken by volunteers and the community and charitable sector?

### **Reply**

The public sector landscape has changed fundamentally over the last decade, but in terms of how people chose to access and engage with services and the resources available to deliver them. When we started this journey in 2009 our communities told us they wanted to take care of themselves and each other, and that the public sector should do its best to enable this. We have therefore worked closely with our communities and Staffordshire's vibrant Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to ensure our residents can access support locally in a way that meets changing lifestyles while still providing value for money.

As a result, the Council has moved away from traditional service delivery models to working in a very different way alongside our communities. This has seen fundamental changes to the way services are offered to residents across a range of areas, including our Community Managed Libraries, Children's Centres and Family Hubs, country parks, highways maintenance, Archives and Heritage, our offer for young people, and more. Using Community Managed Libraries as an example, we now have 27 Community Managed Libraries across the county. They are managed by 18 partner and community organisations with support from 642 volunteers who help to enhance and shape their local library offer.

Through the activities set out in our Strategic Plan 2022-26 and our Communities Delivery Plan, we continue to build on this work with our partners and the VCSE sector, making sure our residents can access the right support at the right time to help them be healthy, independent, and live in sustainable communities. As the way we work with communities across these areas has changed so much and continues to evolve, it is not possible to provide a direct comparison between what is currently available to communities and what was formerly delivered by the Council.

### **Supplementary Question**

Are volunteer agreements in place to ensure that volunteers receive fair and consistent treatment and that it sets out a clear demarcation between their role and the role of staff who have a contract of employment?

### **Reply**

Yes there is a volunteer framework which is being put together which protects volunteers.

Councillor Flunder asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

### **Question**

What are the results from any recent traffic count surveys over a 24 hour average period, along the A53 Leek Road in Endon, between Moss Hill in Stockton Brook and Claylake in Endon?

### **Reply**

There haven't been any recent 24-hour traffic count surveys carried out along the A53 Leek Road, Endon.

Traffic and pedestrian surveys will be carried out before the end of this financial year following your DHP request made on 18 January 2023 to consider the feasibility of replacing the existing zebra crossing with a push-button controlled pedestrian crossing.

The local team will keep you updated of the results in the coming weeks.

## **48. Petitions**

### **Request for crossing outside St Luke's School, Endon**

Councillor Flunder submitted a petition for a traffic light controlled crossing outside St Luke's School in Endon.

**Chairman**