

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:

- This month saw an increase of 910 claimants, which is at least partly likely to be due to continued seasonal effects and jobs created over the festive period coming to an end. The total number of claimants in the county now stands at 15,715, or 3%, one of the lowest rates in the West Midlands and lower than the average for England of 3.8% of the working age population. The youth claimant count in Staffordshire saw an increase of 165 claimants to a total of 2,920 young people. The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit has increased this month from 4.4% to 4.7%, although this remains lower than the national rate of 5%.
- Since 2010, around 42,000 additional new jobs have been created in the county. This has of course been one of the main reasons why we have seen record low levels of unemployment and remained resilient to the recent global economic events. One of our main growth sectors over the last couple of decades has been the logistics industry, with around 11,000 new jobs created in this sector alone and which now accounts for around 29,000 of jobs within the county.
- The new Pets at Home distribution centre in Stafford will open shortly, creating over 750 new jobs, whilst construction on the West Midlands Interchange site will progress this year and will ultimately create 8,500 new jobs in South Staffordshire.
- The recent Logistics Roundtable was attended by some of major players in the industry, including the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, and was an opportunity for us to discuss how we can work together on some of main opportunities and challenges facing the sector, particularly existing and emerging skills needs and the shift to greater use of technology that will support the creation of more highly skilled, highly paid jobs within the sector.
- One of our local SMEs, CocoonFMS, based in Lichfield, has recently been successful in securing £129,000 from the first round of the Freight Innovation Fund in partnership with the major logistics employer Simarco. This will help to create a digital calculator to provide automated management of port costs and shipping expenses,

providing more accurate invoice information to users, reducing delays and improving the planning of deliveries.

- Through our Economic Growth Programme, we also continue to support the development of employment sites across the county. i54 South Staffordshire is one of our flagship employment sites and work to develop two plots in preparation for new occupiers at the site is underway. One of these plots is on the existing site, with the other being on the Western Extension, which will support the creation of a further 1,000 jobs when fully occupied.
- Excellent progress is also being made at the Chatterley Valley West site in Newcastle-under-Lyme where the first development plots are nearing completion, highway access works are due to commence in May and a detailed planning application for the first 75,000 square foot speculative unit is being considered.
- At the Branston Locks site in Burton upon Trent, around 300 houses have now been built, alongside the completion of the first phase of industrial units, 2 of which are occupied by Werner ladders and Syncreon logistics.
- The Shire Hall in Stafford, which we opened last summer following an extensive £2 million refurbishment of the building, has already proved hugely successful and is now home to 15 companies across a range of sectors, with only a few of the units now remaining.

(Cabinet 19 April 2023)

2. Capital Programme for Schools 2023/24

The Cabinet have approved the Schools Capital Programme 2023/24. The Programme will see more than £43 million spent on maintaining and improving Staffordshire schools to ensure Staffordshire children can learn in surroundings that enhance their education and give them the best possible start in life.

The money will also see more schools benefitting from our decarbonisation programme by replacing inefficient systems, and more pupils with SEND benefitting from improvements in the existing provision they receive.

The programme will also provides for two new primary schools to be built. These are a new primary school to go with the new housing development at Burleyfields in Stafford, and another to the south of Shortbutts Lane in Lichfield to accommodate new homes being built there.

(Cabinet – 15 March 2023)

3. Highways and Transport Programme 2023/24

The Cabinet have approved the Highways and Transport capital investment proposals.

Under the proposals, over the next two financial years the County Council is to invest an additional £30M to support its commitment to fix more roads. This year will see a total of over £50 million invested in a range of major projects, vital local improvements, and general road maintenance. The additional investment being made by the County Council will enable five major road reconstruction schemes at key locations into our towns, the resurfacing of nine junctions/roundabouts, an extra 275,000 sq. m of preventative surface treatments and £1M of additional work to repair highway drainage.

The Council has also been successful in securing £19.8M through the Levelling Up Fund for improvements to roads and bus and cycling routes in Staffordshire that will see investment in environmentally friendly buses and active travel between Stafford and Cannock, as well as significant investment around the A38 Branston interchange in Burton upon Trent.

(Cabinet – 15 March 2023)

4. Pothole Funding

A good, connected road network is important for this council, for our residents and our business.

On top of the additional £30m this county council is investing in our highways in the next two years, we are also pleased to be receiving more than £4m from the national pothole fund.

While any additional national funding is welcome, we continue, along with other local authorities, to make it clear to Government that investment in long-term maintenance in our roads is necessary.

5. Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028

The County Council and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) have jointly developed a final draft of a new Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028 titled 'Good Mental Health in Staffordshire'. This replaces the previous Mental Health Strategy 'Mental Health is Everybody's Business'.

The Strategy takes into account recent national policy changes, the impact of the Covid pandemic on people's mental health, and related local strategies and plans to improve mental health and wellbeing and mental health services. The strategy sets out six main outcomes:

- Everyone can look after their own mental wellbeing and find support in their communities when they need it.
- People have access to services when needed.
- A timely response to crises.
- There is equal access to support to improve mental wellbeing and services to manage mental health problems.
- People with severe mental illness are supported to live in the community and have good quality, integrated care.
- More integrated, good quality services for young people that focus on achieving independence in adulthood.

The Cabinet have approved the Strategy and the Health and the Wellbeing Board will monitor delivery of the associated action plan.

(Cabinet – 15 March 2023)

6. Our People Strategy 2023 and Beyond

The Cabinet have approved the refreshed People Strategy for 2023 – 2027. This refreshed Strategy builds on the work undertaken to date and provides a planned approach to ensuring the Council’s workforce is ready to meet the key challenges the authority faces over the next four years. The strategy sets out 23 commitments under four pillars to shape a culture that supports delivery of the council’s Strategic Plan, inspires innovation, and allows the organisation to perform at its best for the people of Staffordshire.

The four pillars are:

- Attracting and keeping talented people.
- Promoting a positive work environment.
- Developing skills for now and the future.
- Developing leaders for now and the future.

(Cabinet – 15 March 2023)

7. Staffordshire County Council Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

The County Council has a duty to develop, maintain, apply and monitor the implementation of a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy as Lead Local Flood Authority. The Cabinet have approved a revision of the Council’s previous Local Flood Risk Management Strategy so as to take account of lessons and learning that have taken place and to reflect national and regional changes in guidance.

The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy sets out roles and responsibilities for flood risk management, and establishes our policies, our

objectives and our actions to manage flood risk. Progress on the implementation of the Strategy will be monitored by the Council's officers and reported regularly to the Cabinet Member and as required through Scrutiny and Cabinet.

(Cabinet – 15 March 2023)

8. Staffordshire Better Care Fund 2022 - 2024

The Cabinet have received an update on the Staffordshire Better Care Fund (BCF) Plan for 2022-23 together with a summary of arrangements for development of the BCF Plan for 2023-24.

The Cabinet noted that, progress over the past year included a new social care workforce strategy, helping to support the recruitment and retention of home care staff by offsetting some cost pressures; improving the quality of care on offer in our care homes; and supporting home-first discharge to improve outcomes for people leaving hospital.

They were also informed that the 2023/24 BCF Policy Framework had not yet been published and it was the current working assumption that all existing schemes would continue with relevant inflationary uplifts in order to maintain essential health and care services and that therefore most of the funding would follow on from previous years. The Health and Well-being Board had delegated final approval of the Staffordshire BCF Plans for 2023-24 to the Chairs, including the Cabinet Member for Health and Care.

(Cabinet 19 April 2023)

9. Staffordshire Day and Coronation

The month of May saw us celebrate Staffordshire Day and then King Charles III's Coronation.

Events were held across the county to mark the two events and on the additional Bank Holiday Monday, the spotlight was very much on volunteering as part of the Big Help Out.

This is an annual event, which this year was brought forward to tie in with the Coronation.

In Staffordshire, we are hugely fortunate to have a fantastic network of voluntary community groups.

This is a sector which we continue to support and invest in and they "repay" this funding several times over in the contribution they make to this county and our local communities.

10. Staffordshire's Quality of Life

Of course, all of us in this chamber know what an amazing county Staffordshire is to live or work.

Great transport links, good employment and learning opportunities, affordable housing compared to many areas and an outstanding rural backdrop.

For too long, we have probably been one of the country's best kept secrets. However, as part of our wider We Are Staffordshire work we are now proudly saying come and join us, come and live here, come and set up your business come and visit us.

Launched on Staffordshire Day, our **A Place to Thrive** Campaign highlights why so many more people are choosing the county as their home.

11. UKREiiF

Our recent visit to UKREiiF built on this, when we were able to showcase more than £1bn worth of investment opportunities across the county.

The wide-ranging investment offer by the council and partners was presented to more than 6,000 delegates at the UK Real Estate Infrastructure and Investment (UKREiiF) Conference, an event which brings together local and regional public sector organisations with Government, investors, funders, developers, housebuilders and more.

12. Recruitment

As well as investment in Staffordshire, we are also keen to both keep and attract the best staff we can across all our services.

This is particularly key in both children's and adults' care, traditionally a difficult recruitment area.

People have told us that, of course, salaries are important, but it is also the value they bring and the way they are valued which are hugely important, something which was again evident in feedback from a recent event.

That is why our new social care workforce strategy, which has been developed by not just the council, but the NHS and other public sector and private partners aims to put staff and their goals and aspirations at the heart of care across Staffordshire.

13. And Finally

Following an extraordinary meeting of this council, Pat Flaherty, the current Chief Executive of the London Borough of Harrow, was appointed as the new Chief Executive of this council.

Pat, who was born and raised in Staffordshire, will be joining the council on July 10.

Of course, that means we will also soon be saying farewell to our current Chief Executive, John Henderson.

John's final day at the council will be on July 7, which this means this will be his last appearance at Full Council.

John has been with the county council for eight years and has been a huge presence, both at the council and in developing relationships with partners and government.

He will undoubtedly be sorely missed, but I am sure you will join me today in thanking John, who also made Staffordshire his home, for the contribution he has made and the legacy he will leave.

We wish John all the best for next chapter in his life and career.