

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 11 February 2021

Present:

Attendance		
Ben Adams	Colin Greatorex	Kyle Robinson
Charlotte Atkins	Gill Heath	David Smith
Philip Atkins, OBE	Phil Hewitt	Paul Snape
Ann Beech	Jill Hood	Bob Spencer
David Brookes	Syed Hussain	Mike Sutherland
Gill Burnett	Keith James	Mark Sutton
Ron Clarke	Julia Jessel	Stephen Sweeney
Tina Clements	Bryan Jones	Simon Tagg
Maureen Compton	Dave Jones	Martyn Tittley
John Cooper	Ian Lawson	Carolyn Trowbridge
Mike Davies	Alastair Little	Ross Ward
Derek Davis, OBE	Johnny McMahon	Alan White
Mark Deaville	Paul Northcott	Philip White
Alan Dudson	Jeremy Oates	Conor Wileman
Janet Eagland	Ian Parry	Bernard Williams
Ann Edgeller	Kath Perry, MBE (Chair)	David Williams
Helen Fisher	Jeremy Pert	Victoria Wilson
Keith Flunder	Bernard Peters	Mark Winnington
Richard Ford	Jonathan Price	Susan Woodward
John Francis	Natasha Pullen	Mike Worthington

Apologies for absence: Trevor Johnson and Jason Jones

PART ONE

32. 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
David Brookes	36	Personal	The owner of a site impacted by the Uttoxeter Town Centre Master Plan is also constructing an agricultural building for Cllr Brookes
Mark Deaville	36	Personal	Owner of a small business
Helen Fisher	36	Personal	Co-Chair of Chasewater Friends
Keith Flunder	36	Personal	In receipt of a small grant from Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

John Francis	36	Personal	Resides on Cannock Chase and is also a Member of the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
Johnny McMahon	36	Personal	Board Member of Chasewater Friends
Susan Woodward	36	Personal	Co-Chair of Chasewater Friends
Susan Woodward	36	Personal	Leader of Burntwood Town Council

33. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 10 December 2020

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 10 December 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

34. Chairman's Correspondence

Staffordshire residents recognised in Her Majesty The Queen's New Year's Honours

Members extended their congratulations to Dr Richard Harling, the Council's Director for Health and Care, in being awarded an MBE for services to public health and adult social care in Her Majesty The Queen's New Year's Honours.

The Council also extended congratulations to the following Staffordshire residents who had also been awarded an honour:

- Mrs Sarah Ann Beaumont, OBE, lately CEO Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs CIC, for services to social enterprise.
- Mr Lee Pardy-McLaughlin, OBE, child and family principal social worker at Coventry City Council and former Staffordshire County Council employee and Staffordshire University lecturer, for services to children and families.
- Mr Brian Roberts, OBE, finance commissioner at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, for services to local government and public sector finance.
- Maj (Rtd) Robert John Cross, MBE, chairman, North Midlands Branch Gurkha Welfare Trust, for services to Gurkha veterans.
- Mr Ronald Flowers, MBE, former Wolves and England footballer, for services to football.
- Mr Joseph Garcia, MBE, director of operations South East Coast Ambulance Trust, for services to emergency response, particularly during the pandemic.

- Mr Paul Jonathan Morris, MBE, founder and CEO, Addmaster UK Limited, for services to exports.
- Mr Darren Teale, MBE, Founder Junction 15, for services to media and vulnerable communities in the UK and abroad.
- Ms Susan Tipton, MBE, managing director Protocol Consultancy, for services to apprenticeships and charity in the West Midlands.
- Dr Nigel John Tringham, MBE, lately editor Victorian County History of Staffordshire, for services to local history, especially in Staffordshire.
- Mr Michael John Deakin, BEM, chairman Kibblestone District Scout Council, for services to voluntary services to Scouting and to charity in Staffordshire.
- Mrs Patricia Diane Geraghty, BEM, pharmacist dispensing technician, for services to pharmacy services in Leek during the pandemic.
- Mrs Maureen Elizabeth Recine, BEM, former Girl Guiding county commissioner, for services to Girl Guiding and charity.
- Mrs Gladys Mary Turnbull, BEM, Wolverhampton Netball and founder of Whitmore Netball Club, for services to sport and the community.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The Chairman paid tribute to those who continued to care for and provide support to everyone within communities in Staffordshire during the on-going Covid-19 pandemic.

She also indicated that it was more important than ever that people followed the Government's guidance by only leaving home for a small number of essential reasons which included essential shopping and to go to work if they could not work from home.

The Dignity in Care Awards

The Chairman informed the Council that nominations for the 2021 Dignity in Care awards opened on 1 February 2021. The awards honoured the unsung heroes in Staffordshire communities who cared for the most vulnerable. The Chairman also extended her thanks to all the County's carers for the invaluable work they did and continued to provide each and every day.

Former County Councillor Vera Ivers MBE

The Council were informed of the death, on 15 January 2021, of former County Councillor Vera Ivers MBE. Cllr Ivers served on the County Council between

1985 and 1997 and represented the Leek South (Staffordshire Moorlands) County Electoral Division.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins paid tribute to Cllr Ivers following which Members stood and observed a one minute silence to her memory.

35. Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/2026 and 2021/22 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 Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/26 and 2021/22 Budget and Council Tax proposals.

Cllr Sutherland expressed his thanks to the County Treasurer and those other members of staff who had assisted in the development of the MTFS, the Chairman and Members of the Corporate Review Committee's Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group for the robust manner in which they had challenged and questioned Cabinet Members during their scrutiny of the MTFS/budget proposals, and also to his Cabinet colleagues and Members of the Senior Leadership Team.

In introducing the report, Cllr Sutherland explained that the Strategic Plan was the primary document that shaped the financial plans and the Corporate Delivery Plan. Developed and delivered in tandem, they were supported by a range of directorate, service and team plans across the Council. The Plan had been refreshed and set out a clear vision for Staffordshire: "a county where big ambitions, great connections and greener living give everyone the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy. And where the people of Staffordshire will:

- Have access to more good jobs and share the benefits of economic growth
- Be healthier and more independent for longer
- Feel safer, happier and more supported in their community"

Cllr Sutherland referred to the profound impact the Covid-19 pandemic had had on the work of the Council and also its finances, including the delivery of proposed savings. He added that there was a high level of uncertainty in the MTFS due to a number of factors including the on-going impact of the pandemic, and the demand for the provision of care services.

He informed the Council that Staffordshire continued to have one of the lowest levels of Council Tax amongst the Shire Counties in England. He added that the proposals before the Council provided for the general council tax increase (i.e. in line with the principle of taking the tax increase allowed by government up to the referendum limit) of 1.99% for 2021/22 and thereafter. In addition, the Spending Review announced that the government would again permit social care authorities to raise council tax by a further 3% to help with funding pressures in social care. This would result in a council tax at Band D of £1,360.62 for 2021/22, which was an increase of 4.99% when compared with 2020/21.

Members noted that the capital programme in 2021/22 was over £100m and that the main projects included in the programme were:

- Expansion of three secondary schools in the Lichfield and Stafford areas;
- Expansion of a number of primary schools across the county, plus two new schools;
- Development of Greenwood House, Burntwood in partnership with the NHS to deliver a modern doctors' surgery and pharmacy;
- Continued construction of Stafford Western Access Route and the i54 Western Extension;
- Expansion of business parks in Cannock and Newcastle;
- Regeneration of the Eastgate quarter of Stafford.

Cllr Sutherland also informed the Council that, in February 2020, a balanced budget was reported for 2021/22 with headroom in the future years. Since then, the pandemic had had an impact across all services and its impact would continue to be felt for a number of years to come. The position for 2021/22 was a balanced one but the headroom which was part of the period in February 2020 had now been used to part fund cost pressures and there remained significant budget gaps in years two and three of the period. These gaps reflected the level of financial uncertainty in the future and also the longer term impact of the pandemic.

Cllr Charlotte Atkins expressed the view that the Covid-19 pandemic had highlighted inequalities in society; that the proposed 4.99% increase in Council Tax was a regressive Tax and came despite proposals for £47.7m in cuts by 2024. She also stated that Central Government had failed to deliver on its pledge to solve the crisis in social care; that the promised Green Paper was still to see the light of day; and that Public Sector workers (outside the NHS) faced a proposed Government imposed pay freeze.

Cllr Parry and Cllr McMahon spoke about the role of the MTFS in ensuring that the Council was able to meet the needs of its residents. They also referred to how the Council had responded to the Covid-19 pandemic including the support it had made available to local businesses and the local economy; and measures it had taken to strengthen domiciliary care. They also referred to the Council's proposed £43m increase in the budget for social care. Cllr McMahon added that the Council was in discussions with the Clinical Commissioning Groups regarding how they and the Council could work more closely together.

Cllr Brookes stated that he recognised the difficulties the Council was facing and he expressed his support for the MTFS proposals. He also paid tribute to the Cabinet for keeping the level of council tax amongst the lowest for Shire Councils.

Cllr Sutton referred to the priorities contained within the Council's Strategic Plan and the support the Council gave to children and families. He also referred to how services for children and families were being transformed.

Cllr Philip Atkins referred to the priorities contained within the Strategic Plan and, in particular, how residents and communities were encouraged to help themselves and one another and thus enable the Council to focus its resources on those who were the most vulnerable. He also stated that he supported the comments made by Cllr

Charlotte Atkins in relation to the need for Central Government to find a long-term solution to the funding of social care.

Cllr Woodward expressed the view that the Council had been let down by Central Government during the pandemic, for example, through having to supply personal protective equipment (PPE), support for care homes and the provision of additional testing and thus placing additional burdens on Council Tax payers. She also referred to savings the Council was proposing to make in its MTFS which would impact upon mental health services and also the rural county. Cllr Woodward also expressed concern at the level of debt owed to the Council. In response, Cllr McMahon indicated that there was a task and finish group looking into the level of debt owed to the Council and how this may be reduced. Cllr Deaville added that the Council would continue to deal with the challenges it faced, and he commended the Council's decision to supply PPE to care homes etc. Cllr Edgeller referred to Cllr Woodward's comments in respect of mental health services and indicated that, in Stafford, Members were in discussions with the local MP regarding lobbying Central Government for additional funding for mental health services.

Cllr Robinson referred to the aging population in the County and how this contributed to pressures on the health and care system and indicated that the current method of funding was unsustainable and that a long-term solution was needed. He expressed the view that the Council had not been fully reimbursed by Central Government for its additional costs and loss of income arising from the Covid pandemic. He also referred to the vital contribution made by volunteers in the County and expressed his disappointment at the Government's proposal to freeze the pay of public sector workers who were often at the forefront of dealing with the pandemic.

Cllr Philip White spoke about the Council's continuing response to the pandemic, both by officers and Members; and the need for the Authority to create the right conditions for economic growth/recovery through working with partners.

Cllr Alan White and Cllr Sutherland concluded the debate by indicating that the Council provided value for money and spent the Council Tax it received effectively. Cllr Sutherland also referred to how the Council had responded positively to the pressures placed upon it during the Covid pandemic.

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

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:

Ben Adams	Keith James	Bob Spencer
Philip Atkins, OBE	Julia Jessel	Mike Sutherland
David Brookes	Bryan Jones	Mark Sutton
Gill Burnett	Ian Lawson	Stephen Sweeney

Tina Clements	Alastair Little	Simon Tagg
John Cooper	Johnny McMahon	Martyn Tittley
Mike Davies	Paul Northcott	Carolyn Trowbridge
Mark Deaville	Jeremy Oates	Ross Ward
Janet Eagland	Ian Parry	Alan White
Ann Edgeller	Kath Perry, MBE	Philip White
Helen Fisher	Jeremy Pert	Conor Wileman
Keith Flunder	Bernard Peters	Bernard Williams
Richard Ford	Jonathan Price	David Williams
John Francis	Natasha Pullen	Victoria Wilson
Colin Greatorex	David Smith	Mark Winnington
Gill Heath	Paul Snape	Mike Worthington
Phil Hewitt		

Those Members voting against the recommendations:

Charlotte Atkins	Alan Dudson	Dave Jones
Ann Beech	Jill Hood	Kyle Robinson
Ron Clarke	Syed Hussain	Susan Woodward
Derek Davis OBE		

Those Members abstaining from voting: Nil

RESOLVED – (a) That the following be approved:

- (i) the adoption of the Strategic Plan as set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- (ii) a net revenue budget of £530.296m for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix 14 to the report;
- (iii) planning forecasts for 2022/23 to 2025/26 as set out in Appendix 14 to the report;
- (iv) a contingency provision of £5.000m for 2021/22;
- (v) a net contribution from reserves and general balances of £6.255m plus a contribution to the Local Taxation Fund of £5.204m for 2021/22;
- (vi) a budget requirement of £529.245m for 2021/22;
- (vii) a council tax requirement of £388.150m for 2021/22;
- (viii) a council tax at Band D of £1,360.62 for 2021/22 which is an increase of 4.99% when compared with 2020/21. This results in council tax for each category of dwelling as set out in the table below:

Category of dwelling	Council Tax rate £
Band A	907.08
Band B	1,058.26
Band C	1,209.44
Band D	1,360.62
Band E	1,662.98
Band F	1,965.34
Band G	2,267.70
Band H	2,721.24

(ix) that the County Treasurer 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;

(x) the Financial Health Indicators set out in Appendix 13 to the report.

(b) That the following recommendations which are included within the Capital and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2021/22, the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 and the Commercial Investment Strategy 2021/22 (Appendices 12a to 12c to the report) be approved:

(i) the Minimum Revenue Policy for 2021/22 as contained within the Capital and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2021/22 in Appendix 12a to the report;

(ii) the Prudential Indicators as set out within the Capital and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2021/22 in Appendix 12a to the report;

(iii) the 2021/22 Treasury Management Strategy, based on the 2017 CIPFA Codes (Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code), and 2018 MHCLG Guidance (on Local Government Investments and on Minimum Revenue Provision);

(iv) to adopt the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) 2021/22 as detailed in paragraphs 60 to 107 and Annex A and Annex B of the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 (Appendix 12b 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 109 to 119 of the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 (Appendix 12b to the report);

(vi) the proposed borrowing strategy for the 2021/22 financial year comprising maximising the use of cash in lieu of borrowing as far as is practical; the ability to borrow new long-term loans, where deemed appropriate; the use of cash to repay loans early, subject to market conditions and a loan rescheduling strategy that is unlimited where this re-balances risk;

(vii) that the Treasury Management Strategy recommendations operate within the prudential limits set out in Annex C of the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/22 (Appendix 12b to the report) and 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 2021/22 (Appendix 12c to the report) and 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 2021/22;

(xi) a maximum limit for an individual service investment loan of £10 million in 2021/22;

(xii) that any upwards change in the amounts of the limits specified in recommendations (x) and (xi) be delegated to the County Treasurer in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance.

(c) That the County Treasurer be authorised to adjust centrally-held budgets or contributions to or from reserves as appropriate, to reflect any grant and local taxation changes announced in the final 2021/22 Local Government Finance Settlement;

(d) That the Cabinet Member for Finance and the County Treasurer 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.

36. 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.

Uttoxeter Town Master Plan

Cllr Brookes referred to the proposed Uttoxeter Town Master Plan and expressed concern at the way in which the public consultation on the Plan had been conducted by the East Staffordshire Borough Council. He indicated that he had not been consulted prior to the Plan's approval and that the public consultation had only lasted for twelve days. He urged that the Borough Council be requested to review the Plan and also properly consult the residents of Uttoxeter. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that he noted Cllr Brookes' concerns.

Communities Principle – Update and Delivery Plan

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Cllr Robinson expressed the view that, in his opinion, the Community Cabinet Support Member (CCSM) roles did not provide value for money and he asked that they be subject to an appraisal. In response, Cllr McMahon, Cllr Peters and Cllr Wilson stated that the CCSM's in their areas had provided an outstanding service and had been very proactive. Cllr Wilson added that she would ask all Members to continue to engage with their CCSM, their parish councils and volunteering groups, and also stated that the Council had a strong record of working with its communities.

Cllr Edgeller referred to the good work going on in communities to support those with mental health care needs.

Cllr Woodward referred to partnership working with Parish Councils and indicated that little had happened in this respect in her area and that she would like to see a roadmap as to how this may be taken forward. Cllr Jessel responded by indicating that Members should take up the challenge of leading on the establishment of partnership working in their area as it was not just a matter for the CCSMs.

Cllr Sutton highlighted the work taking place regarding children and families and the adoption of a "place based approach" led by the Families Strategic Partnership. He also referred to the three-tier working taking place in South Staffordshire.

Cllr Jessel referred to the Council's Climate Change action plan and the work which had been done to date. She also added that the Climate Change Action Fund had proved to be a great success with local communities and had seen many innovative schemes. Cllr Greateorex indicated that he supported the comments made by Cllr Jessel.

North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan (NSLAQP) – Outline Business Case (Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Cllr Tagg extended his thanks to the Council for the work it had done, in partnership with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, to tackle the issue of excessive vehicle pollution in one part of Newcastle-under-Lyme. He requested that the Council permits low emission vehicles, and possibly those vehicles up to seven years of age, to utilise the bus gate. He also referred to odour issues arising from Walley's Quarry in Silverdale. In response, Cllr David Williams indicated that he would be happy to work with Cllr Tagg to see what could be done in respect of the odour issues arising from the quarry.

Cllr Brookes referred to the need to address the issues around the Ashbourne and Derby Road junctions on the A50 as they were in need of improvement in order to cope with the amount of vehicles using this corridor. In response, Cllr David Williams indicated that he was aware of the issues on the A50 and that the Council would work with Ministers with regard to securing the funding of the necessary improvements.

West Midlands Rail Ltd Governance Evolution (Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to what influence the County Council has had over the provision of rail services. In response, Cllr Philip White indicated that the Council had

benefitted from the influence that its officers had been able to exert over the inner workings of West Midlands Rail Ltd. He also paid tribute to Cllr Winnington for the valuable contribution he had made during the time he had served as past chair of West Midlands Rail Ltd.

Cllr Eagland referred to the impact of HS2 on her Division and in particular the amount of parking to be made available at the Cappers Lane Depot and the proposals by Cemex for a new quarry to supply concrete for the high speed rail project. In response, Cllr Alan White indicated that any comments in relation to the current consultation on HS2 should be forwarded to Cllr Jessel who was co-ordinating the Council's response.

Cllr Brookes spoke about the importance of East Midlands Rail to the area and the need for improvements to services, for example, those serving Uttoxeter on Race days. In response, Cllr Philip White indicated that he supported the comments made by Cllr Brookes as there was a need to improve services on the line serving Uttoxeter, particularly at weekends and on Race days.

Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins and Cllr McMahon commended the work of the Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board and also the briefings provided by Council's Director for Health and Care. Cllr Alan White highlighted the good partnership working taking place between the County Council and the eight District/Borough Council's in responding to the Covid pandemic. He also informed the Council of the progress with regard to the roll-out of the vaccination programme.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Investing in our Economy

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Cllr Brookes extended his thanks to the Cabinet for the support they had given in relation to the recent highway improvements in Uttoxeter amounting to around £600,000.

Cllr Flunder and Cllr Winnington paid tribute to the support provided by the Council through its Business Support Scheme. Cllr Lawson also expressed thanks to the council for the support it had provided to local communities and voluntary groups through its Community Fund and also its Covid Fund.

Cllr Flunder requested the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills to confirm that, not only would there be investment in encouraging more Tourism and Manufacturing, but there would also be a focus on skills including apprenticeships and innovation, for example, in 'green' industries, providing better paid jobs for those who worked and lived in Staffordshire.

Cllr Jessel extended her thanks to those "unsung heroes" of the pandemic including teaching staff, refuse workers and sole traders for the contributions they had made in supporting their communities during very challenging times. Cllr Winnington also referred to the vital role played by the farming community in keeping the country fed.

Cllr Philip White extended his thanks to Members for their comments. With regard to the question raised by Cllr Flunder, he referred to the Council's "Staffordshire Means Back to Business" Strategy and the vital role it played in supporting local businesses throughout the pandemic. He added that the Strategy would be refreshed as necessary including support to be provided to the tourism sector, the green economy and the extension of apprenticeships.

Protecting Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation for Future Generations (Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to what plans the Cabinet Member had for the Council's Countryside Rangers. In response, Cllr Wilson explained that, in 2016 "Rural County" committed to MTFs savings of £786,000 to be spread over a five-year period. To date, £446,160 of savings had been delivered. This had been achieved through a management review, leaving vacant posts unfilled and halting non-essential spend. In 2019/20 a restructure of the Service commenced and the consultation raised fears around capacity, particularly at the "front line". In March 2020, all restructures were put on hold due to the Covid pandemic. The MTFs savings had been reprofiled and the actual savings required from the "Rural County" were to be reduced.

Cllr Francis, Cllr Hewitt, Cllr Bryan Jones, Cllr McMahon, Cllr Smith and Cllr Snape expressed their support for the Council's mitigation measures to protect the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation and expressed the view that the proposals were measured and were necessary in order to protect this valuable asset for future generations. Cllr Wilson thanked Members for their comments and for the resilience they had shown during the onslaught of objections submitted in relation to the proposals.

Cllr Bryan Jones stated that he wished to dispel some of the myths around the proposals and confirmed that there were no plans to tarmac the green at Marquis Drive and that the funding from the proposed car parking charges would be re-invested in maintaining Cannock Chase.

Covid Testing (Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Several Members extended their thanks to the Council in respect of its provision of Covid testing across the County including extensions to the hours of operation to include evenings and weekends and the roll-out of pop-up testing sites. Cllr Oates referred to the need for additional testing provision in Tamworth. In response, Cllr McMahon referred to the roll-out of additional pop-up testing which was now visiting seven to nine sites each day. He also added the Council was looking to extend its lateral flow testing offer to businesses with 50 or more employees to replace the current offer to businesses of 200 or more employees.

Cllr Woodward expressed concern that those persons who were least able to self-isolate may be deterred from getting themselves tested. She added that nationally, around 70% of those applying for self-isolation payments were being refused and she asked the Cabinet Member as to how this issue may be addressed. In response, Cllr McMahon

stated that he, together with the Council's Director for Health and Care would look into this issue further.

Roll out of the Covid Vaccine (Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Cllr Charlotte Atkins and Cllr Hood referred to the long-term challenges imposed on individuals due to the Covid pandemic such as the learning gap between pupils from different backgrounds. Cllr Charlotte Atkins enquired as to what plans the Council had to assist those from disadvantaged backgrounds to catch-up with their learning and also how the Council would work with the NHS to address mental health distress amongst schoolchildren. In response, Cllr Edgeller referred to the need for there to be a mental health Champion in every school. Cllr Price added that every school had a staff and pupil welfare representative on their governing body. Cllr Sutton also informed Members that there was a comprehensive guide to the pathways available to support mental health amongst schoolchildren on the Council's website and he would ensure that, if it had not already been done, a copy would be circulated to all Members. Cllr Price added members that, with regard to the need for schoolchildren to catch-up on their education, the Government had appointed an Education Recovery Czar who would be responsible for drawing-up proposals as to how pupils would be helped to catch-up.

Cllr Winnington extended his thanks to all those NHS staff and volunteers who were assisting with the vaccination programme across Staffordshire.

Cllr Brookes also paid tribute to Uttoxeter racecourse and the local GP practices with regard to their support for the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccines to the people of Uttoxeter and the surrounding area. He, together with Cllr Woodward, referred to the role which Members could play in relation to being ambassadors for the testing and vaccination programmes. Cllr Woodward, Cllr Deaville Cllr Edgeller and Cllr Perry also referred to the vaccination centres which had been set up in their areas and expressed their thanks to those involved. Cllr McMahon added that, in addition to vaccination centres, the NHS had made arrangements for the vaccination of those who were housebound and also the homeless.

Cllr Alan White indicated that the Council was talking to its MPs about going forward and living with Covid. He also added that, unlike some authorities, the County Council was strictly adhering to JCVI guidelines with regard to the vaccination programme.

Economic Recovery (Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Cllr Philip Atkins referred to the recent good news that JCB were to recruit an additional 400 people. He also spoke about the impact of new technologies such as electric cars and 5G, and also how town centres would need to change if they were to remain viable.

In response to a question from Cllr Woodward regarding the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, Cllr Philip White informed the Council that details of the Fund were still awaited but it was understood that the Fund would be launched in March 2021. Cllr Alan White added that the Council was working closely with the Local Enterprise

partnership to ensure that when new funds were released the Authority was ready to take advantage of them.

The Dignity in Care Awards (Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

The Chairman encouraged Members to submit nominations for the 2021 Dignity in Care awards. Cllr McMahon indicated that this was the seventh year of the awards. He added that the profile of the care sector had been raised substantially during the Covid pandemic.

Winter Grant Fund

Cllr Woodward indicated that she had been informed that the ability to submit on-line applications under the Winter Grant Fund had been put on hold due to the volume of applications which had been received and she enquired as to when the applications were likely to be processed. In response, Cllr Sutton indicated that monies made available by Central Government under the Winter Grant Fund was finite and it was likely that, very shortly, the Council would have allocated all of the available funding.

RESOLVED – That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received.

37. Questions

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

Question

Will the Staffordshire County Council or its highways contractors be purchasing the excellent new JCB pot hole repairing machines and how soon will I be seeing these machines repairing the many potholes within my division of Uttoxeter Town and throughout the County of Staffordshire where I understand that they are manufactured, supporting local jobs and efficiently repairing our broken highways in a more cost effective and efficient way, especially now we have no need to follow the EU procurement rules, or perhaps can you tell us how many of these brilliant machines already been ordered or purchased?

Reply

The county council's highways team have been working with and advising JCB on the development of their pothole-repair and other highway maintenance priority solutions for a number of years.

JCB's new Pothole-Pro machine was launched on 11 January. As a flagship Staffordshire based company the county council was delighted to support the launch, including sharing publicity materials across highway sector professional networks.

Arrangements to test the equipment on Staffordshire's road network are in development and we hope to carry out trials in the coming weeks. This involves

testing its practical use against a range of different parameters, including different road construction types and where sites are physically constrained.

The trial will inform both the county council and JCB on how the Pothole-Pro machine compares with the range of different pothole repair techniques already used across Staffordshire's diverse road network. It will show whether the product can add value to Staffordshire's road repair operations now and will also provide JCB with useful feedback on further development potential. I'll be pleased to share the findings with Members in the coming weeks.

Supplementary Question

Could I urge the Cabinet Member to bring this new Pothole-Pro machine into use in the local area so that JCB can use this opportunity to promote their machinery and for the benefit of local residents?

Reply

As you are aware, this is a new machine and we need to access its capabilities before considering rolling it out for use in the County.

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

Question

Over the years, very sadly Staffordshire, like other roads and highway networks throughout our Country, has seen many unfortunate fatalities. What policies do we have for permanent memorials on, or adjacent to our public highway network to enable the families of those victims or for others for whatever reason to erect permanent memorials either on or adjacent to our Highways and what policies do we have for pedestrianised highways or Town Centre Market places regarding memorial benches and monuments etc, and have we or do we have a policy to close highways and what would happen to this land?

Reply

The County Council's programme of road safety engineering, education and training activities has contributed to Staffordshire having one of the safest highway networks in the country. By working closely with organisations through the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership, a considered and evidence led approach is adopted that ensures best use of resources as we continue to put measures in place to further reduce the number of tragic incidents on our roads.

The County Council recognises that the placing of a tribute at the roadside can be an important part of the grieving process for some individuals following the loss of a loved one; however, we have a responsibility to ensure that no items placed within the highway serve as a distraction to passing motorists and consideration must be given to how the tribute would affect drivers using the road.

Paying tribute at a memorial placed within the highway setting can also present a road safety risk and, therefore, the Council will work with local communities and their representatives to ensure any locally agreed memorial bench or monument is appropriately sited. The County Council's statutory responsibility is to ensure the highway is not obstructed and that any items placed within the highway are covered by an appropriate legal agreement. Within a town centre / pedestrianised setting, full consideration must also be given to maintaining accessibility for all.

The legal process to close a section of public highway is known as "stopping up" which permanently removes highway rights from the road and results in the area of land reverting to the adjacent landowners.

Supplementary Question

The County Council has given temporary permission for the erection of a memorial in Uttoxeter during the period of Remembrance. Can the Cabinet Member inform me, in the light of the statement read during the meeting of the Uttoxeter Town Council on 9 February by Cllr Philip Hudson, of the type of consent given, the type of street furniture being installed in the Market Place in Uttoxeter which is temporary and removable, and the amount of correspondence with Uttoxeter Town Council informing them of this agreement?

Reply

Both telephone conversations and official documents have been sent and the Uttoxeter Town Council is aware and has been given notice by the County Council that the equipment they have on this site is to be removed. The site itself has a temporary permission for use during the period of Remembrance.

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

Question

Will the Cabinet Member for Highways help to improve the back log of New Residential Parking Zone applications, all new applications which meet the criteria will bring in an annual income, this will help to offset some of the financial losses from the car parking revenue due to Covid 19?

Reply

The County receive a significant number of requests for Permit Parking Schemes (PPS) from local residents every year. Each one is reviewed and prioritised against the criteria outlined in the On-Street Parking Strategy. Schemes anticipated to be delivered this year are:

- Forebridge area of Stafford; and
- Hattrell Street, Newcastle Under Lyme.

Permit Parking Schemes are often difficult to implement quickly. It is not uncommon for us to receive mixed responses to the scheme from residents once the operational restrictions and costs of joining and annual membership have been worked through.

The council does not generate a net income from its on-street parking activities. Permit Parking Scheme charges contribute to the operating costs performed by the council's parking team, which is also responsible for responding to day to day activities, regulatory functions and potential Pay & Display schemes. However, the current impact of Covid has seen a reduction in demand for some of these other activities, meaning that more resources are currently able to be directed towards progression of potentially viable Permit Parking Schemes.

The upfront costs of design, Legal Adverts and the onsite signing and lining measures can also be a barrier to the viability of Permit Parking Scheme. Recently, this has been overcome by securing developer contributions, such as at:

- Cherry Blossom in Hednesford; and
- A future scheme earmarked for Castle Brickworks in Stafford.

Supplementary Question

I understand that a local resident has not received a response to his application and 12 months have now passed since it was submitted. Can arrangements be made for residents to at least receive an acknowledgement of their application?

Reply

If you would like to send me the details of the application to which you refer I will ensure that the application is acknowledged.

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

Question

On average, how long does it take for the County Council Highways design team to design a traffic calming scheme involving speed humps to be paid for out of a County Councillor's Divisional Highway Programme?

Reply

The timescales for the design and delivery of traffic calming schemes vary greatly depending on the complexity of the proposed measures; the impact on the local community and key stakeholders; and the detailed design and construction issues that need to be addressed as part of the scheme delivery.

In general, it is traffic calming feasibility reports that are delivered through a councillor's DHP allocation. Traffic calming scheme costs will invariably exceed a councillor's DHP allocation and can cost many tens of thousands of pounds to design, consult and construct.

A feasibility report to consider traffic calming for an area would typically be completed within the financial year it is requested, normally within 6-12 months. The length of time to produce the feasibility report is determined partly by any site surveys that are required to complete the study, for example traffic surveys, pedestrian surveys, topographical surveys; and also by the level of design team resource available to produce the report. The engineers in the design team work on multiple projects concurrently to deliver the Integrated Transport programme across Staffordshire that is circa £8 million per annum. If the feasibility study recommends traffic calming, recommendations need to be agreed, and funding needs to be sought for the estimated scheme costs.

A typical traffic calming scheme timeframe would be as follows:

- Year 1 – complete a feasibility study and produce a report. Agree which recommended measures to take forward. Seek funding for the proposals.
- Year 2 – once funding is in place, carry out the detailed design of the scheme; consult statutory and key stakeholders, the local community and members of the public; construct the scheme on site. Many simpler, less contentious schemes would be completed in the second year.
- Year 3 – for more complex and contentious schemes - continue with detailed design, consultation and construction processes as required.

Turning specifically to Cllr Atkins's DHP request for a feasibility report into traffic calming on Morley Street, Leek, the request to carry out the study was received by the design team on 11th November 2020. The report and associated drawings have been completed and, if they haven't already, will be issued to Cllr Atkins shortly. In this instance, the study has taken approximately 3 months from the request to the design team to the issuing of the report.

Supplementary Question

I have chased this issue six times since November and have still not received a response. How much is the traffic calming proposal on Morley Street, Leek likely to cost as I need to see whether it can be facilitated from my DHP funding?

Reply

I am sorry to hear that you have not received a response and if you forward copies of your correspondence to me I will ensure that you receive a response in a timely manner.

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

Question

My Division has seen an unprecedented crime wave since the beginning of the pandemic culminating with two arson attacks on Friday, January 29th. This has led to many residents expressing their serious concerns to me of feeling unsafe in their own homes and business owners feeling extremely vulnerable. There is considerable pressure on Stone town police officers who are stretched to the limit in tackling crime. They are working all hours and shifts to combat what is happening in the town and their continued hard work is showing results with arrests made.

Can the Cabinet Member please give an update of how Staffordshire Police are dealing with the changing face of crime during this pandemic and could this involve an increase in police officer numbers to give out a clear message that we will not tolerate the activities of the criminal element who have been coming into Stone from other areas to profit during this pandemic?

Reply

Thank you for the question. Following a discussion with Chief Superintendent Jennifer Mattinson, Head of Neighbourhoods and Partnerships at Staffordshire Police, I can provide the following update on how Staffordshire Police are dealing with the changing face of crime during this pandemic and confirmation that police officer numbers in Staffordshire are increasing.

Firstly, it is pleasing to read that the policing of Stone has drawn positive comments. The neighbourhood policing team, alongside other force depts have moved quickly to effectively tackle the recent increases in offences and to ensure the community feels safe.

During the pandemic there have been significant crime reductions across the vast majority of crime types. All crime has reduced by 14.7% meaning there have been 12,155 fewer victims this year. There have been new challenges of course for policing with a significant amount of new legislation related to Covid 19 and the Police have been asked to 'police' activities which ordinarily would not have required any intervention such as gathering with others from your household. It has been a challenge to balance the police response between what has become known as 'the 4 Es' – Engage, Educate, Encourage and Enforce.

The number of officers in Staffordshire Police is increasing as part of the 3 year programme to increase the national number of officers by 20,000 as announced by central government. The policing of Stone or any other community is never the responsibility of the Neighbourhood Policing Team alone. Whilst that team will work with local residents and are our local face of policing, they are able to call upon central resources to assist them when greater resource is needed.

This may be in the form of support from the Police's Tactical Support Team, the Roads Policing Team or the Neighbourhood Tasking Team for example. Superintendent Mattinson has confirmed that the issues that Councillor Hood referred

to in Stone did receive this extra support from police force resources beyond the neighbourhood team.

Supplementary Question

As we are only in February, are you satisfied that this is a true reflection of crime numbers and will a three-year programme of increasing officer numbers be time enough to stop the predatory crimes we are seeing due to lockdown.

Reply

I do feel that the answer you have been given is a robust one. If you wish to understand better the policing arrangements in Stone, may I ask you to speak to Superintendent Mattinson as she has responsibility for those arrangements.

38. Petitions

Uttoxeter Town Master Plan

Cllr Brookes submitted a petition from local residents entitled "Shelve the Master Plan until residents of Uttoxeter and Surrounding Areas have their say".

Chairman