

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Communities Principle – Update and Delivery Plan

The Cabinet have received an update on the Communities principle and the Delivery Plan which include: (i) context for the Communities principle, together with work undertaken to date and previous discussions with Cabinet; (ii) why the Communities principle is important, what has been achieved so far, and what the Council wants to do moving forward; (iii) the lessons learned during 2020, including the response to Covid-19; and (iv) a proposed delivery plan for the Communities principle.

The Communities Delivery Plan is a programme of change that includes several different elements of work with the following aims

- Work with our partners to ensure a locally tailored, community-led support offer is available and accessible for our residents.
- Promote social action and encourage local communities to help themselves and each other to stay healthy, resilient, and improve the place they live. This includes building capacity in communities and strengthening our VCSE sector.
- Ensure communities are a fundamental part of our culture and how we work as an organisation.

The Communities Delivery Plan will focus on a programme of work with the following three core workstreams that form the basis of our community-led support offer:

- Place Based Approach (Families and Communities) – Build on the success to-date of our Place Based Approach model for children and families. This will include further developing our Earliest Help Offer in each district, ensuring our workforce aligns with our communities to meet the needs of families locally, and embedding the lessons from Covid-19 into how we best use our community assets (e.g. children's centres, libraries).
- Supportive Communities (Health and Care) – Learning from the success of the Place Based Approach, work is ongoing to establish the Supportive Communities programme as part of the adult social care pathway. This includes embedding the recently launched Community Help Points (using local assets such as libraries), promoting self-help and digital resources (including Do-It Staffordshire and Staffordshire Connects), and supporting the wider workforce with training and development.
- Troubled Individuals – Working with adults with complex needs alongside the existing Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC) partnerships locally. This will include an initial focus on rough sleepers and a new Adult Treatment Care Pathway contract.

It has been agreed that a further review of funding for the Communities will be brought back to Cabinet for discussion in early 2021.

(Cabinet – 16 December 2020)

2. North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan (NSLAQP) – Outline Business Case

The Cabinet have considered the proposed response to a legal order from Government to reduce excessive vehicle pollution in one part of Newcastle-under-Lyme to legally acceptable levels. The County Council as Highway Authority is supporting the project, although not included within any Ministerial Direction to date. Officers from the County Council have been directly involved as members of the project team (the Joint Officer Group – JOG) since early 2019 and the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport has been a member of the decision making Joint Advisory Group (JAG)

The preferred option provides for a range a range of proposals including:

- A50 Victoria Road Bus Gate
- A53 Etruria Road Bus Gate
- Traffic Management East and West of Victoria Road
- Transport Improvements along A53 Etruria Road
- Bus Retrofit Programme to achieve Euro VI emission standards
- Bus Infrastructure Improvements
- Monitoring and Evaluation Package

The Outline Business Case for the North Staffordshire Local Air Quality Plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide exceedances which will now be formally submitted to Central Government, in line with the requirements of the 2018 Direction and subsequent amendments by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The preferred option, subject to Government approval of the Final Business Case, will be wholly funded by Central Government and implemented in late 2021 and 2022, in order to achieve compliance in 2023 with statutory limits for roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations.

(Cabinet – 16 December 2020)

3. West Midlands Rail Ltd Governance Evolution

The County Council has been a Member of West Midlands Rail Ltd since its establishment in 2015. This has enabled the Council to have significant local influence and involvement over local rail services including the direct management of the West Midlands Rail Franchise.

There is now a desire for West Midlands Rail Ltd to evolve its existing governance arrangements and strengthen its relationship with the Mayor of the West Midlands. This will help to increase its ability to achieve its policy aims, namely continue to deliver local leadership for local rail services by working with the rail industry to deliver a step change in rail services across the West Midlands Rail Ltd geography.

The Cabinet have given their approval to the proposed amendments to the governance arrangements which include:

- Changes to the Articles of Association will permit the Mayor of the West Midlands to become a non-Director, non-voting Chair of West Midlands Rail Ltd.
- The creation of two new Vice Chair roles.
- The delegation of the powers that will enable the Mayor as Chair to represent and publicise West Midlands Rail Ltd through lobbying and related activities and survey to advance West Midlands Rail Ltd's purpose.

(Cabinet – 16 December 2020)

4. Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board

The Cabinet have received an update from the COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board including the country entering in a third national lockdown following a rapid and substantial rise in the number of cases of Covid-19 in large part due to the emergence of a new and more infectious strain of the virus; the number of cases in Staffordshire during the first half of January 2021 being higher than at any point during the pandemic; the increased pressure on the NHS with almost half of hospital beds given over to care of Covid-19 patients; the rolling out of the Covid-19 vaccination (with the priority groups for vaccination being people over 70, care home residents and staff; all other health and care workers, and people deemed 'clinically extremely vulnerable'); and the Council's continuing efforts to prevent and control the spread of the virus including testing for people without symptoms being available to all residents with at least one site in each district and borough.

(Cabinet – 20 January 2021)

5. Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Investing in our Economy

The Cabinet have approved proposals for the delivery of further investment in our economy, by the County Council and its partners, most notably through enhanced two tier working. Under the proposals, £862,000 of Staffordshire County Councils resources are to be made available to support the following activities:

- Staffordshire 500, Apprentices Wage Support (£500,000)
- Nil Cost Training for Employers Top Up Project (£104,000)
- Small Business "To Thrive" Financial Support (£150,000)
- Additional Capacity (up to £108,000)

The Cabinet have also given authority to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills, in consultation with the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills and the Director for Corporate Services, to amend the proposed allocations and capacity, in light of ongoing discussions with Staffordshire's Districts and Boroughs within the envelope of resources as allocated above.

(Cabinet – 20 January 2021)

6. Protecting Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation for Future Generations

The Cabinet have considered proposals for Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to mitigate impacts of recreational pressure associated with a growing resident population. The plans propose a range of on-site measures across the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and include the investment of housebuilders' money over 15 years to improve trails, way signs and interpretation boards; carry out conservation education in schools; and influencing where people park so that footfall can be reduced where the landscape and wildlife are most vulnerable and increase capacity where it is more robust.

The Cabinet have agreed that:

- (i) The operational delivery of the mitigation measures be overseen by the Assistant Director - Culture, Rural and Safer Communities; and
- (ii) That agreement of options appraisal / feasibility study outcomes for Chase Road and Marquis Drive be delegated to the appropriate Cabinet Member in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities.

(Cabinet – 20 January 2021)

7. Covid Testing

As a county council, we have moved swiftly to roll out Covid Testing for people without symptoms across the county.

Our first priority was to set up a Community Testing Site to serve every district and borough area. These now operate seven days a week, to give people who are working the opportunity to get tested at the weekend. We are also looking to offer more evening testing too.

These are being supported by Community Testing Pop-Ups which tour the county offering people local testing.

Businesses are also coming on board to test their own staff, with Alton Towers and Burton Albion among our recent signings.

We know that one in three people who have the virus show no symptoms and since the start of 2021, more than 300 people who had no symptoms have been identified as part of our community testing programme.

If they hadn't stepped forward to get tested, it is highly likely that they would have unknowingly gone on to infect many, many more people.

That's why we want everyone who needs to be out and about during lockdown to make testing part of their week, so please do everything you can to encourage people in

your community to get tested. It is free, quick and easy and might just save someone's life.

8. Roll out of the Covid Vaccine

The roll out of the Covid vaccines has brought with it a resurgence of hope that the end of this pandemic is in sight.

In Staffordshire, Cobra Biologics, based at Keele University's Science and Innovation Park, has played a key role in the manufacturing of the Oxford vaccine.

It was therefore great to see the mass Covid vaccination centre open its doors and the vaccine put into practice at the Kingston Centre in Stafford.

There was also further good news that all eligible care homes have now been offered the first dose for residents

However, in speaking to the Government's Science and Technology Committee, our own Richard Harling, warned the shadow of Covid-19 is likely to be felt for years to come.

The roll out of the vaccine is a source of optimism, but as a county council we know that there are many challenges which need to be overcome to keep rates down and allow time for the vaccine to make its impact.

9. Economic Recovery

With Covid restrictions likely to be in place in some form for some time to come, we are committed to doing everything we can to help this county and our economy bounce back in 2021.

Throughout this pandemic ourselves and our district and borough partners have worked closer together than ever before, with a joint goal of protecting lives and livelihoods.

By pooling a targeted county council investment with district and borough council support, funding of programmes could get off the ground and benefit small businesses imminently.

The Staffordshire 500, Apprentices Wage Support programme would for example see up to 500 apprentices created by incentivising employers to take on 16 to 24-year-olds by contributing to the cost of their wages. This would be a great career start for many young people.

10. The Dignity in Care Awards

The awards to honour the unsung heroes who care for the most vulnerable in our county are always a truly amazing and humbling experience.

I have no doubt that this year will highlight some exceptional stories and some exceptional sacrifices made during this pandemic.

As a county we undoubtedly owe all our carers a huge debt of gratitude for the support that they have continued to provide each and every day.