

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. 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 and noted that the number of cases of Covid-19 across the country and in Staffordshire was falling but remained high, placing on-going pressure on the NHS; the vaccination programme was proceeding according to the priority groups defined by the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation, with those at highest risk from Covid-19 vaccinated first; most residents of care homes for older people and those aged 80 and above had already received their first dose of the vaccine and the NHS was now focusing on vaccinating frontline health and social care workers who provided care for clinically vulnerable people, as well as those aged 70-79, and individuals who were clinically extremely vulnerable; the next groups to be vaccinated were those aged 65-69 and individuals with a range of underlying health conditions; and the Council and its partners continuing efforts to prevent and control the spread of the virus with more testing being made available for people with and without symptoms.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

2. Staffordshire Means Back to Business: Investing in our Economy

The Cabinet received an update on “Staffordshire Means Back to Business” activity including the following matters:

- UK clothing firm Asos’s decision to build a £90million distribution centre in Staffordshire at Fradley Park, Lichfield, creating 2,000 jobs over the next three years.
- A £48million distribution base for national retailer Pets at Home has been approved in Stafford creating 1,200 jobs.
- Pledges from District and Borough Councils in Staffordshire totalling just under £3M to support the following initiatives:
 - Staffordshire 500, Apprentices Wage Support
 - Nil Cost Training for Employers Top Up Project
 - Small Business “To Thrive” Financial Support
- The Council taking ownership of the former Magistrates building in Stafford which will form part of the Eastgate regeneration scheme.
- The extension of i54 in South Staffordshire and the discussion with a potential investor on the site.
- 158 people signing on to the Staffordshire Start Up Scheme.
- The Council’s new Start-Up Business Loans scheme was now operational.
- The work with the Council’s Destination Management Partners to support the Leisure Tourism and Hospitality sectors.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

3. Climate Change Strategic Development Framework

The Cabinet have approved the Council's proposed Climate Change Strategic Development Framework which sets out, in simple terms, the Authority's approach to the complex challenge of achieving net carbon zero which is a legal requirement set by government in May 2019.

The document provides a refreshed carbon base line for the Authority, measured in 2018/19, so that the scale of the challenge is understood. It is intended that a system is put in place to monitor and report progress on an annual basis.

The framework also sets out the authority's role in influencing both the local and national agenda, working with key stakeholders and ensuring that County Council Members are informed and seen as climate change champions for the community that they serve.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

4. Implementation of the Updated Staffordshire County Council Education Infrastructure Contributions Policy (SEICP)

The Cabinet have approved an updated Education Planning Obligations Policy, now called "Staffordshire Education Infrastructure Contributions Policy" (SEICP) in response to new and revised guidance/legislation. The Policy outlines the Council's approach to assessing the impact of new housing developments on mainstream and early years educational provision and the appropriate mitigation measures.

By updating its contributions policy, the Authority can ensure that it can continue to secure enough mainstream and early years places, as well as securing special education places and home-to-school travel assistance for eligible pupils.

The updated "Staffordshire Education Infrastructure Contributions Policy" will be implemented with effect from 1st March 2021.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

5. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy 2021-26

The Cabinet have approved an updated SEND Strategy 2021-26 which details how the Council and its partners will support the inclusion of all children and young people, particularly those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This Strategy builds on the outcomes of the 2018 Ofsted/CQC Local Area SEND Inspection and the Written Statement of Action.

The Strategy has been co-produced with key stakeholders including health and education representatives, parents and carers. The draft strategy was also the subject of public consultation, which took place between November 2020 and January 2021, to seek feedback on the proposed vision, priorities and activities by which the Council would shape its work and decisions in relation to SEND over the next five years, and to inform the development of the new strategy.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

6. Staffordshire History Centre: National Lottery Heritage Fund – Round Two Submission

The Cabinet have approved the submission of the round two bid for National Lottery Heritage Funding for the Staffordshire History Centre project which will provide additional storage, release the current QB Archive Outstore and support the Council's Property Strategy. If the bid is successful, the Cabinet have also agreed that the planned capital investment and project delivery costs of £6.332m for the four-storey extension of the Staffordshire Record Office be approved and that this is added to the Council's capital programme.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

7. Digital First - Update and Plan for the Digital Principle

Digital is fundamental to the way Staffordshire County Council works as an organisation, as well as how it interacts with partners, citizens and communities. As such, digital is one of the four key principles set out in our Strategic Plan 2018-22.

As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, digital has become even more critical to how we live, work, and communicate with each other and it is vital that as an organisation the Council continues to review and develop its approach to digital so that every citizen and business can flourish in the digital age.

With this in mind, the Cabinet has approved a new strategy for the digital principle called 'Digital First' which builds on the progress the Council has made with digital so far and sets out how the Authority will become a genuinely digital organisation for the 21st century. The proposed delivery plan for Digital First, features 32 projects. The Plan also includes proposals as to how continuous digital improvement will be embedded across the organisation.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

8. Integrated Performance Report 2020-21 – Quarter 3

The Cabinet have received an overview of the County Council's progress, performance and financial position in delivering against its Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan. They were informed that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic remained a huge challenge to the Council's finances.

At the end of Quarter 3, the overall assessment on the Council's performance and financial position was amber. There were £14.5m savings currently classified as Low confidence of delivery, of which £10.3m was due the impact of Covid 19. Savings classed as undelivered were Adult Placement Services Savings of £19,000, Reducing Nursing Care placement costs of £0.2m and Reviewing Enterprise Centres of £50,000. Some savings classified as low confidence included Adult Social Care In House Services, and Reduction in Looked After Children as a result of transformation and property rationalisation.

The latest revenue forecast outturn showed an overspend of £0.587m (0.1%), compared to the overspend of £1.809m (0.3%) at Quarter 2. This was mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

9. Supportive Communities – Update and Delivery Plan 2021/22

The Supportive Communities Programme was agreed by Cabinet in March 2020. Since its 'go live', shortly afterwards, the programme had worked in collaboration with the voluntary sector and adult social care practitioners to support the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic; introduced and embedded Community Help Points; launched multiple online tools to strengthen our digital information, advice and guidance offer; and handed out £203,199 in funding to local community groups to help them to support their communities.

The Cabinet have considered the achievements of the Supportive Communities Programme during 2019/20, including its response to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lessons learned. They have also approved the Council's aims and priorities for 2020/21 which include:

- Widening the scope beyond the primary support need of older people to include all adults who contact Staffordshire County Council Adult Social Care.
- Extending focus across the adult social care workforce to encompass all support areas.
- Extending focus to embed this approach within the Council's commissioned providers and wider partnerships.
- To continue to improve the digital and assistive technology offer whilst supporting individuals who are digitally excluded in alternative approaches by improving access.
- To engage and work more collaboratively with communities and voluntary sector partners with a particular focus on working with Parish Councils.
- To underpin all of this with strong partnership arrangements, robust data and insight and effective communication and engagement.

(Cabinet – 17 February 2021)

10. Covid-19 Lockdown Anniversary

It is difficult to believe that in a matter of just days, on March 23, it will be the first anniversary of when the country was placed in national lockdown.

It has been a year that none of us will forget. It has been an incredibly difficult 12 months and so many families and businesses have suffered so much heartbreak and loss.

However, I am also incredibly proud of the hard work our partners and our communities continue to do to help us through this.

With the continuing roll out of the vaccine, we are all at last daring to feel hopeful that the worst is behind us, but whether this is the case is now down to each and every one of us.

As lockdown restrictions are eased even further over the coming months, it is hugely important that we continue to stick to the rules, get vaccinated when eligible and make testing for this virus part of our routine.

We will continue to work with community and faith leaders to ensure information and advice is factual, proportionate and accessible to all.

We remain absolutely committed to focusing on the challenges which still lie ahead whether that be a new variant, localised outbreaks or fluctuating cases and it is our partnership work which will put us in the strongest position to deal with these.

11. Schools

I am sure most parents were delighted to see all children returning back to school this month, not just because of the challenges of home schooling but because our schools in Staffordshire are happy, vibrant places of learning.

Our schools have worked tirelessly to keep their doors open to help parents who are key workers, but have also made sure all our schools were safe for pupils to return.

I would like to thank all school workers who have ensured our children still received the education they need during this pandemic.

12. Hospitality Sector

The tourism, leisure and hospitality sector play a key part in not only helping our economy flourish, but also in employing thousands of Staffordshire people.

This sector has of course, been particularly badly affected during the pandemic and we want to do everything we can to ensure that businesses are able to reopen their doors safely soon.

I would encourage everyone to do what they can to support our local businesses and venues when they reopen and shop and spend leisure time here in the county.

13. Staffordshire Day

Finally, I know we are all incredibly proud of this county and Staffordshire Day is our chance to bang the drum about what a fantastic place it is.

Over the last five years, Staffordshire Day has allowed us to celebrate everything that's great about our county, from our rich heritage and culture to our stunning locations and places to visit.

Being mindful of the pandemic, we have had to be creative about how we mark the day and this year will see the first ever Staffordshire Day Film Competition.

There's huge talent and creativity in our county, and this will give film makers of all levels the chance to get involved and tell their Staffordshire story.