

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

**Question to Cllr Philip White
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills**

By Cllr Charlotte Atkins

Question

What assessment has Staffordshire County Council made of the numbers of people in the County affected by the removal of the £20 uplift in Universal Credit and the impact this will have on them, with the rising costs of living, particularly of energy and food? What additional plans are in place to support vulnerable families struggling to make ends meet after this substantial cut in their household incomes?

Reply

Many people in Staffordshire have received the temporary uplift in Universal Credit and we are working with partners to understand the impact of ending this support. This includes the announcement last week from the Government that a new Household Support Fund (HSF) grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. This new grant will run from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and totals over £5.5 million for Staffordshire.

At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.

A plan for this funding is currently being developed with partners, principally the Borough and Districts, but we expect that this will help people across Staffordshire who are unable to meet the costs for food, energy and water this winter.

Our work to grow employment has meant that the County historically has had low rates of unemployment and high employment rates which has meant that the claimant count is now 3.6% compared to 5.1% nationally. But during the pandemic we have continued our work to

support people to progress in work or find work, particularly the low paid and low skilled who have been most affected.

The County wide Redundancy Task Group has provided support to businesses and people to remain in work, upskill and reskill or secure new further employment opportunities. This includes helping to co-ordinate the Government plan for Jobs, promoting the Kickstart and restart schemes helping young people and adults find work. The Recruitment & Redundancy Triage Service has worked with over 2,000 people to find work or training. The Staffordshire Means Back to Business scheme in partnership with our District and Borough Councils provides over £5million to help start or business their grow, train their staff and recruit apprentices. Over £2million has been committed directly to businesses through the scheme creating over 200 apprenticeships and enabled over 200 businesses to upskill their workforce.