

QUESTION 7

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 14 OCTOBER 2021

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

By Cllr Pardesi

Question

When local companies, farmers and small businesses face a possible crisis of rising energy prices, a supply chain problem and a worker shortage, what is this Council doing to support them?

Reply

Staffordshire County Council alongside a wide range of partners including the DWP, district and borough councils, HE, FE, and private companies has put in place a wide range of business, employment and skills initiatives to support the local businesses and residents in the recovery from the pandemic. This includes challenges around energy, supply chain and worker shortage.

Much of this activity is channelled through the Staffordshire Business Helpline. This is managed as part of the Stoke on Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub. Staffordshire County Council is the accountable body and contributes resources to enable these to function.

In relation to energy, calls, emails and webchats come into the Business Helpline and Advisers signpost and refer businesses to the place where they will receive the most appropriate help and assistance to resolve their query. In the case of energy, they would be signposted to SBEN who would work to help them using the Low Carbon Evolution Programme - a project which provides the company with a two-day energy audit and then access to up to £20,000 of grant funding to assist in the purchase of equipment which will reduce their energy usage. The County Council provides funding to support SBEN.

Supply Chain issues have become a priority. In response the Growth Hub has agreed a partnership with the Manufacturing Growth Programme to run a pilot Supply Chain Programme which involves two workshops in October and January for up to 30 businesses in Staffordshire to look at ways to improve their supply chains, understand the importance of managing them effectively and de-risk supply chain issues through continuous improvement. 15 of these companies will also receive the

opportunity of an individual supply chain audit which will include a bespoke action plan for them. A report will be created after the audits to provide intelligence to the key partner organisations of the Growth Hub on the main issues facing Staffordshire businesses and supply chains.

Further support is available through the £5 million Staffordshire Means Back to Business Scheme. This provides funding and business support to SMEs in Staffordshire – including a COVID-19 recovery grants programme, investment to fund wages for apprentices and nil cost workforce training to help businesses take on new staff and upskill their existing staff. The Growth Hub also works closely with the Universities and Colleges as well as private training providers to ensure that workforce training is discussed with local businesses at every opportunity.

Worker shortage is also supported through the countywide Redundancy Task Group and the setting up of the 'Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service.' Here, jobs and careers specialists, from local advisors right up to and including the DWP and BEIS, have come together with local public, private and FE and HE sector partners, both to support individuals at threat of redundancy into work in new emerging growth sectors, and also support businesses experiencing extreme change themselves. The group has the experience, skills and business intelligence to move at pace, mitigate redundancies and support businesses experiencing growth to recognise and take on immediately available local people with the talent and transferable skills they need to realise their potential.

In summary, the County Council, with its partners, is working hard to support business working with the challenges of energy cost, supply chain and worker shortage.