

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Adult Learning Disability 2022 Community Offer: Update on Learning Disability Residential Services Directly Provided by Staffordshire County Council

The Cabinet have approved proposals to extend and refurbish the Hawthorn House lower building to accommodate up to 15 residents, to ensure that adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities can be cared for in an environment that best suits their needs. They have also approved the disposal of the Hawthorn House upper building, once the new lower building development is complete.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

2. Climate Change Annual Report and Climate Action Plan Action Plan 2

The Cabinet have considered feedback from the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee where Members commented on the Council's first Climate Change Annual Report. The report records the positive progress that has been made on the Council's target to become net carbon zero by 2050. The Cabinet have also approved the Climate Change Action Plan 2 (CCAP 2) which contains specific actions to be undertaken by the Council prior to 2025 which lists our key climate change mitigating actions over the next 4 years.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

3. Formal Report of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Cabinet have considered a Formal Report by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in relation to Post 16 travel for a SEND child. They have noted the findings of the report and have agreed to implement the recommendations contained therein.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

4. Impact of Covid-19 on SCC Communities, Economy and Organisation and Recovery Progress – Update October 2021 and Way Forward

The Cabinet have considered the high-level priorities which have been identified for recovery from the impact of Covid-19 across the County Council and the continued progress against these; together with the ongoing approach to the leadership, influencing and monitoring of the

recovery process moving forwards. They noted that, following the May 2021 elections, work to develop the Strategic Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2022-26 was underway and would continue throughout the Summer and Autumn. The completed plan and financial strategy would be considered by Cabinet and Full Council in early 2022. The Cabinet also noted that each directorate was leading recovery for its own area, and recovery which cuts across all the directorates was being led through recovery groups linked to the four principles – communities, digital, people and climate change.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

5. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 2, 2021/22

The Cabinet have received an overview of Staffordshire County Council's progress, performance, and financial position in delivering against its Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan. They noted that, at the end of Quarter 2, the overall assessment on the council's performance and financial position was AMBER. Although significant progress had been made across the organisation during the quarter, challenges remained in relation to capacity and demand across all service areas. There continued to be areas of financial risk in Adult Social Care and Families and Communities. The latest revenue forecast outturn showed a forecast saving of £1.992m (0.4%). This was compared to the previous forecast of a saving of £8.119m (1.5%) at Quarter 1. The Cabinet also approved the use of up to £3.2m of the Exit and Transition Fund to support the cost of redundancies associated with the Children's Transformation programme.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

6. Nexxus Trading Services Limited – Annual Report 2020/21

The Cabinet have considered Nexxus Care Annual Report 2020/2021 which summarised the activities and Performance of Nexxus during 2020/2021. They noted that Nexxus Care achieved good performance and rapid growth during 2020/21. The company had 414 staff and in 2020/21 had an annual turnover of £6.238m, £2.344m (60%) greater than the previous year. Key achievements over the year included:

- maintenance of care services during the Covid pandemic;
- establishment of a lateral flow device testing service within a very short timescale, which has now completed over 107,000 tests; and
- digital transformation across the business.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

7. Supplementary Capital Programme for Schools 2021/2022

The Cabinet were informed that Central government recently confirmed an extra £300m national investment for maintaining and improving the school estate. This additional funding, combined with a new methodology for calculating School Condition Allocations (SCA), resulted in an increased amount of funding for the upkeep of County Council maintained schools. The Cabinet have therefore approved the Schools Capital Programme Phase 2 2021/22 investment proposals as follows:

- Planned Maintenance - £2,118,842
- Planned Maintenance (Sustainability) - £1,122,688
- Climate Change - £331,797
- Priority Projects - £1,106,161
- Toilet Refurbishment - £878,599
- Health & Safety - £128,155
- **TOTAL Phase 2** - £5,686,242

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

8. Branston Locks Primary - Proposed 2FE and Associated S106 Contributions (Wave School)

The Cabinet have approved the acquisition of land and the development of a 2-form entry primary school at Branston Road, Burton on Trent to be known as Branston Locks Primary School under the Department for Education's wave programme. The Department for Education will contribute any capital over and above the £6,400,000 Section 106 Contribution for the construction of the new school.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

9. Staffordshire Bus Strategy - Bus Service Improvement Plan

The Cabinet have approved the submission of the Staffordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which has been developed in partnership with the public bus providers operating in Staffordshire. The BSIP is ambitious and represents an ask of government of some £113m to deliver outcomes which have been shaped by a recent public engagement exercise and comments from the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on the 16 September 2021.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

10. Household Support Fund

The Government has announced a new Household Support Fund (HSF) Grant which will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this winter. 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 HSF should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. The Cabinet have approved the proposed expenditure and delivery arrangements for the HSF in Staffordshire which is required to be fully spent by 31st March 2022.

(Cabinet – 20 October 2021)

11. Half Yearly Treasury Management Report for the Period Ended 30 September 2021

The Cabinet have received a summary of the Council's borrowing and investment activities during the first six months of the year. They noted that:

- all transactions were undertaken by authorised officers and within the limits approved;
- all investments were to counterparties on the approved counterparty list and fully met the requirements of the relevant regulations;
- the Council operated within the limits and Prudential Indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Practices and Annual Treasury Management Strategy, with the exception of the Upper Limit for variable rate interest exposure and the External Loan limit. With regard the Upper Limit for variable rate interest exposure, it was noted that this indicator was calculated based on the highest expected cash balance in the year which, because of additional grant and money received at the end of 2020/21 such as Covid-19 pandemic support, Local Enterprise Partnership funds and the Midland Engine, has been higher than forecast. The result of this was that approval was required to revise the indicator from £259 million to £340 million. With regard to the External Loan Limit, it was noted that the External Loans indicator, set at £464 million for the whole of 2021/22, represented a full year of activity and, therefore, the outturn estimate. Currently the actual loan figure was £468 million, exceeding the estimate by £4 million. A loan was due to be repaid on 21/02/22 which would bring the indicator in line for year end;
- the Council maintained a cautious approach to investments. The policy of using cash instead of borrowing continued to generate savings, helping reduce the average interest the Council pays on its debt; and
- the Council's borrowing and investment activities are being undertaken prudently and in line with agreed strategies in a very challenging environment.

(Cabinet – 17 November 2021)

12. Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update

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

- The County Council was successful in its bid for Community Renewal Funding, £751,000, to support the Staffordshire Means Back to Business Programme. Working with Staffordshire Districts and Borough Councils, this takes the total amount available to the business community in Staffordshire to in excess of £6M to support apprenticeships, training and business start-up activity.
- The Council’s Business and Enterprise Team, as part of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Directorate, have been able to secure £581,800 of One Public Estates Brownfield Land Release Fund to support the demolition of the former Magistrates Court in Stafford. This site forms part of the efforts to drive forward town centre regeneration through the Eastgate Programme.
- Cannock Chase District Council have also been successful in their Levelling Up Fund bid and have been awarded £20M to support key regeneration schemes in their town centre.
- Staffordshire continues to see job vacancies increase, which grew by 18% between September and October, equivalent to over 5,400 more job vacancies. Through the Staffordshire Means Back to Business the Council is making good progress not least through supporting nearly 240 apprenticeships.
- The co-ordinated and quick response Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service was continuing to offer free bespoke plans to any Staffordshire and Stoke business who need to restructure but also want to help their staff get into other work in growth sectors as quickly as possible. Following the conclusion of the Governments Job Retention Scheme on the 30th September, very few redundancy notification forms had been received for the Staffordshire area. The few that had received mainly related to changes in T&C’s and not potential risk of redundancy.
- Responding to the increased job vacancies and limited redundancies, with partners, the Council has tweaked the name of the service from ‘Redundancy and Recruitment Triage Service’ to the ‘Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Triage Service’. This is in recognition that people don’t have to have been made redundant to contact the service which

is very much about ensuring people and jobs have access to each other.

(Cabinet – 17 November 2021)

13. COVID-19

The Cabinet have received an update from the COVID-19 Member led Local Outbreak Control Board and noted the following:

- The number of new cases of Covid in Staffordshire remains high, and above the England average. Cases rates were highest in school age children, although these were falling due to schools adopting proportionate measures to limit transmission of infection, the 12-15 vaccination programme, and rising natural immunity in this age group.
- The NHS plans to accelerate booster vaccinations for over 50s and first doses for 12-15 year olds. The NHS and social care are coping at the moment but continue to experience considerable pressure from Covid and other conditions.
- The need for residents to continue to take sensible precautions to limit the spread of infection such as good hygiene, keeping a respectful distance, and wearing face coverings in crowded indoor places; and also continuing to get a Covid test twice weekly.
- The Council is continuing to maintain Covid defences for the remainder of 2021/22. This includes testing and contact tracing, as well as managing outbreaks and supporting the most vulnerable. These will be reviewed in line with emerging Government policy.

Making sure as many people are vaccinated as possible remains the key priority for the county council and our NHS partners this winter.

With Covid rates still high, the vaccination programme has proved to be the real game changer in the UK.

It is important, that everyone gets the vaccine and also the booster as soon as they are eligible and, the good news is it has never been easier to get the jab.

Testing goes hand in hand with this. The new emphasis is on personal responsibility, with people encouraged to get a lateral flow test if they are out and about in crowded places or meeting up with friends and family and, also to get a PCR test if they have any symptoms, however mild.

14. Winter Bonus for Home Care Staff

Our home care staff do a fantastic job giving people the support they need to both remain in their homes or to return there after a spell in hospital.

In what is thought to be the first deal of its kind the NHS has agreed to fund to the tune of £2.8million a winter package of recruitment and retention incentives for staff this winter.

While this is a one-off initiative, it is a great example of how the NHS here in Staffordshire and ourselves are proactively looking for solutions and I am sure it is one that many other areas will follow.

15. Winter Operations

Staying with winter, there is one thing which is a constant for the county council, and this is the fantastic job our gritting crews do year in and year out.

Officially, winter starts for us as early as October and our crews are now well into the swing of helping keep us safely on the move.

We have one of the biggest highways networks in the country and so we do need to prioritise gritting where it is needed most.

I would encourage people to find out more on our winter webpages.

16. SWAR

It was great to see the Stafford Western Access Route fully opened to traffic last month.

Construction of the £63million project began in the summer of 2019 and work continued safely throughout the pandemic period.

It is a fantastic example of how such major projects can support future growth of towns by unlocking development sites for new homes, businesses and community facilities.

17. 2021 Community Fund

The 2021 Community Fund has closed after a really successful period from its launch in June. The fund focused on recovery from Covid-19 but with a broad spectrum, to allow communities to use it on what they need most. One group receiving funding has bought kitchen items to allow them to set up in a new venue; another put on new activities to help recruit new members. Others have returned to delivering community events, or made one-off investments to help future fundraising. The common theme is that member funding has allowed these communities to start to get back to

normal. We received 204 applications in all, and more than 40 in November after we extended the deadline. For now, the priority is processing applications and payments, but detailed analysis of this year's fund is also underway and will be presented to county council next year.

18. 2021

This time last year, as a county we were facing tough Covid restrictions and as a country we were hurtling towards a full-on lockdown.

It has been amazing to see how as a county, this council, our partners and our residents have really pulled together to get where we are today.

We can't take our eye off Covid just yet, but the hope, belief and ambition is for a brighter, stronger 2022.

I would like to thank each and every one of you in the chamber, for the role you continue to play on behalf of your communities and this council.

Finally, I would like to wish you and your families a happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.