

Date: 13 March 2024

County Council - Thursday 14th March 2024

Dear Sir / Madam,

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the County Council.

I am now able to enclose a copy of the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was circulated.

9. **Questions**

(Pages 3 - 16)

Questions to be asked by Members of the County Council of the Leader of the Council, a Cabinet Member, or a Chairman of a Committee. The question will be answered by the relevant Member and the Member asking the question may then ask a follow up question which will also be answered

John Tradewell
Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services



Question No. 1

County Council Meeting – 14th March 2024

**Question to Councillor David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

By Councillor Nigel Yates

Question

Over winter we have experienced an unprecedented increase damaging potholes so much so that it appears that both the Inspection Team and the responsive maintenance teams (Amey) have clearly been unable to cope – exemplified by potholes reported on 5th January, not being inspected until 22nd February, categorised for an emergency repair and still unresolved a full week later, this situation is being compounded by the delay in repairing Cat 3 potholes, that have deteriorated to the extent of being de facto Cat 1's or Emergency potholes responsible in many cases for vehicle damage.

Is there an option in the Highways Maintenance contract to directly use alternative local contractors on a responsive basis to expediently repair these serious potholes outside of the contract with Amey, and thus prevent the potential for vehicle damage and risk of subsequent claims?

Reply

This winter has been particularly challenging and has recently been reported as the wettest winter in 130 years – seeing 2.5 – 3 times more than normal rainfall. Following 10 named storms since the late autumn, rivers have been full and the ground saturated, together with cold winter nights the impact on fragile road surfaces has also been significant – with close on trebling of emergency and high-risk defects that we've ever recorded previously.

Our highways teams deserve great credit for responded remarkably well to the challenge: moving resources and working tirelessly 24-hours-a-day and 7-days-a-week to ensure those defects that pose the greatest risk to public safety have been made safe as quickly as possible. We've also been boosting our capacity in the inspection team to deal with the increase in enquiries.

Throughout January and February across the county:

- 98% of emergency defects were attended to within 2hrs;
- 94% of category 1 defects were attended in 24-hours; and
- Just under 70% of category 2 defects were repaired within 7-days.

In the Biddulph North Division alone 103 jobs have been completed since 1 January 2024.

As we now start to wind-up the winter gritting operations and head towards the warmer and dryer main road repair season our full armoury of pothole repair resources will be ramped up again, including the high output seasonal velocity patcher crews.

Over the next three years we're investing an extra £50m into local road maintenance. Through this investment we will be delivering an enhanced programme of capital maintenance schemes to replace sections of life-expired roads as well as carrying out around 100 miles of pothole prevention surface treatments and 30,000 individual pothole repairs each year.

Delivering this extra investment will of course require increasing operational capacity. We have the option of doing this directly or as sub-contractors through the contract with Amey.

County Council Meeting – 14th March 2024**Question to Councillor Victoria Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture****By Councillor Syed Hussain**

Question

Knife crime in our communities poses a threat to both individual safety and society as a whole. Will the council consider implementing prevention measures to tackle the underlying issues of knife crime, like youth engagement programmes, mental health support, and educational interventions, while collaborating with local communities to ensure the effectiveness of these efforts?

Reply

Staffordshire County Council is a partner of the **Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire's Violence Reduction Alliance (VRA)** which works together to strengthen the visibility and partnership response to prevent violence including knife crime, with a focus on early intervention and prevention. There is a website (Violence Reduction Alliance) that contains a resource library for partners to use to support violence reduction activity. SCVYS are a key partner and host the resource for Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PHSE) services to provide a consistent approach to prevention in education settings. A Virtual Reality headset project has been created which is a decision-making tool for young people around knives, gangs and violence against women.

Within the County Council, the **Staffordshire Youth Offending Service (YOS)** Prevention offer works with children who are identified as being on the cusp of becoming involved in criminality. This includes children where there may be intelligence which identifies risks of weapon carrying. This prevention has been further strengthened by funding from the Office of the Police Crime and Fire Commissioner's **Weapon Prevention and Diversion Scheme**. The funding enables YOS to purchase bespoke programmes and specialist services to work with children where there are concerns with regards to weapon possession. The funding will also be used to deliver a package of preventative input within schools in Staffordshire, where it has been identified that there may be an increased risk of children becoming involved in possessing weapons.

Staffordshire Out of Court Disposal offer is a working agreement between Staffordshire YOS and Police. This offer ensures that ALL children who are eligible to have an Out of Court Disposal are considered for an intervention at the earliest possible opportunity. This includes children who may have offences related to possession of a weapon. This scheme allows for bespoke tailored interventions to be put in place to address the underlying issues related to this behaviour to reduce the risk associated with such behaviour.

Examples of the work and activities facilitated by VRA are provided below:

Operation Sceptre (national campaign)

Staffordshire participate in the national campaigns which are locally branded "**Ditch the Blade**". These campaigns encourage conversations to show why carrying a blade is not socially acceptable to carry a knife and highlight the dangers and consequences of knife crime.

These will be taking place in weeks 13-19th May 2024 and 11-17th November 2024 . Partners work with the Police on a campaign of awareness of knife crime and include local knife amnesties. Over the coming months additional national law changes may also assist and some of the most lethal knives may be taken off our streets.

Early Intervention and Prevention in Schools

Staffordshire Police's Early Intervention and Prevention Unit and the Pan-Staffordshire PSHE Education Service have created a programme designed for primary and secondary schools that can add value to education settings and increase children's knowledge about the law and the consequences of breaking the law. The programme covers:

Primary

- People who keep me safe - KS1 (5-6 yrs old)
- Keeping safe - KS2 (9-10 yrs old)

Secondary

- Healthy relationships - KS3 (11-12 yrs old)
- Exploitation - KS3 (12-13 yrs old)
- Knife Crime - KS3 (13-14 yrs old)

Responsible Retailer Scheme

On behalf of the VRA, Staffordshire Police and Trading Standards teams from both Staffordshire and Stoke, have developed a Responsible Retailer Scheme asking retailers to consider how they store and display knives, as well as who they sell them to. To support retailers a Responsible Retailer Pack has been produced, containing best practice advice, a summary of relevant legislation and promotional material. The majority of knives purchased from retailers are not used in crime; however, some may be purchased with this in mind. Therefore, the VRA is asking retailers to assess, challenge and check before a sale takes place; they have the right to refuse a sale if they have concerns about how the knife may be used.

Free Awareness Workshops for Parents & Carers on Gangs, Exploitation and Knife Crime

The VRA has funded two free Ben Kinsella Trust awareness workshops for parents and carers on Gangs, Exploitation and Knife Crime – the topics covered include How we can prevent exploitation/knife carrying as parents and as a community. The workshops are taking place this month and the information has been circulated to partners and included SCC children’s services.

It should be noted that less than 1% of all crime reported in Staffordshire in the last 12 months involved a bladed article.

County Council Meeting – 14th March 2024**Question to Councillor David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport****By Councillor Gillian Pardesi**

Question

What do we say to our residents when they continually say that it is pointless talking about additional funding for our highways when every day we see the state of our roads is worsening and waiting for repairs far too long.

Reply

It has been well publicised that decades of previous under-funding from central government for local road maintenance coupled with changing weather patterns is creating unprecedented challenges for local authorities across the UK. In Staffordshire, this winter alone we have seen a near tripling of new high-risk pothole defects arising at the same time of year when repair productivity is severely hampered by wet and cold weather. However, as we move towards the dryer and warmer months of the new road-repair season our full armoury of road repair resources will be ramped up again.

Our huge road network is vital for keeping our county connected and our residents and businesses on the move. And that is why over the next three years we will be investing an extra £50 million into fixing more roads, over and above any money we get from government.

Through this investment we will be delivering an enhanced programme of 34 new resurfacing schemes to replace sections of life-expired roads at key locations in our towns, delivering around £2.75 millions of drainage improvements, carrying out around 400 miles of pothole prevention surface treatments and over the life of the investment period also fixing around 90,000 individual potholes.

County Council Meeting – 14th March 2024**Question to Councillor Victoria Wilson
Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture****By Councillor Arshad Afsar**

Question

As we strive to build a more inclusive and participatory community, I would like to inquire about the county's current efforts to engage with residents from diverse backgrounds and ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes. How are we promoting transparency and accessibility in local governance, and what initiatives are in place to foster meaningful dialogue and collaboration between the council and community members?

Reply**Community Engagement**

The county council frequently engages with residents, partner organisations, and other members of the community. There are lots of ways the engagement takes place, and it varies depending on the activity, and the people we are talking to.

Engagement could be through service-specific routes that involve routinely engaging with service users, or it could be corporately, for example through our social media channels or as part of a major council-wide piece of engagement. Often, we use a combination of methods to make sure we reach as many people as possible.

We want to make this engagement even more effective. To help us do this, we have recently developed a toolkit that all staff can use, which helps to ensure that any engagement meets the same set of quality principles. This means that our engagement will be more consistent, and staff will be more supported to do it well.

The five quality principles focus on **trust, clarity of purpose, clear communication, good planning, transparency, and doing things collaboratively**. The guidance gives staff information about the different audiences they should consider engaging with, and, and information on the groups of people with protected characteristics, who must be considered as part of any engagement or policy. It contains details of options like translation and when this might be useful to support inclusive engagement,

along with other aspects such as digital inclusion to ensure that as many people as possible can engage.

The Community Engagement Guidance also sets out a range of different ways that staff could engage with the community and helps them decide what is most appropriate for their work. Alongside well-established channels of communication and engagement, there are some particularly in-depth methods such as co-production and citizen assemblies, which are models that bring service users or residents to the heart of decision making. As a recent example, working with the diverse community groups in Burton helped to understand how to support people to take up the covid vaccine and these relationships continue to be a central source of guidance on how we design and implement information campaigns.

Over time, as we do more and better engagement, the guidance will continue to evolve. We will be able to give, more examples of successful engagement and share best practice, and support more staff to use these models.

This toolkit and set of principles have been developed with expert staff and tested with members, and the final areas of our staff intranet are now being developed. It will be demonstrated to members and launched across the organisation.

Engagement with under-represented and protected groups

Staffordshire County Council seeks to ensure the views and opinions of its most vulnerable and protected groups are at the heart of its strategy development and decision-making processes. Central to this is the Council's Community Impact Assessment (CIA) process. This framework encourages officers to think about how plans and services being developed may impact upon communities and people with protected characteristics. It ensures the council has given due regard to the wider impacts upon its communities, enabling officers to identify those things which need to be changed in order to ensure services are more accessible and inclusive.

The county council also has access to a range of corporate and partnership mechanisms for engagement, which can be used independently as part of developing a wider conversation with our communities around a specific theme, issue, or service, enabling them to have a voice on the issues that matter most to them. These mechanisms are often targeted and are set out below with a range of examples provided that help demonstrate the breadth of public voice work undertaken with our citizens.

- Healthwatch Staffordshire continues to play a key role in acting as our independent consumer champion for health and social care issues. Their role involves creating opportunities for patients and residents to engage and be listened to so that they can influence the services and decisions that affect their lives.
- The County Council commission a VCSE Capacity Building Framework that enables us to build capacity with voluntary sector groups who provide support to seldom heard communities. These, include Support Staffordshire who work with, for example, groups that support older or rurally isolated people, and SCVYS who, for example, support groups working with children with SEND and groups that support young people in BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) communities. These groups will directly engage with communities and signpost people to support either centrally or through their locality workers.
- There is also a wide range of specific place-based engagement work which is conducted in localities, often with those vulnerable under represented communities. Whilst coverage does vary by area, involvement tends to be appropriate and focused where it is needed the most. Locally, engagement is often supported by our Strategic Delivery Managers and wider staff. In addition, service engagement takes place on a routine basis.
- The Let's Talk Staffordshire website is a new system for our digital engagement and consultation activity. It allows a number of innovative engagement methods which can be 2-way, such as discussion forums, mapping, and functions around Ideas or Stories. Engagement via this can be both short and long term, or even ongoing.
- The role of the local county councillor (member) is also crucial. Through the democratic process residents have a voice through their county councillor, and therefore members receive invaluable feedback through these local routes, including via MP letters. This local intelligence continues to be fed back into the organisation through a range of mechanisms, and therefore provides a rich source of contextual information which we use to supplement our existing data and feedback.

Forthcoming Communities Strategy

A recent example of effective engagement by the county council has been the Our Staffordshire Communities work, to help us develop our Communities Strategy. As part of this work:

- We used member and partner networks to access people beyond our usual audiences and existing reach.
- We made use of digital channels, including social media, and considered our offline audiences. Paper copies of the main resident

survey were available through libraries and key partner organisations.

- We spoke to partner organisations and VCSE sector forums across the county to take their views and feed in.
- We used our extensive network of council staff to help spread the word about the engagement and the reasons behind it and encouraged them to take the survey and share it with family and friends.
- We commissioned specific work to focus on our enquiry themes in a different way. By finding different ways to ask people questions, we made our engagement more accessible. This sought out people who are “seldom heard” in “harder to reach” groups to ensure that their voices were reflected too in our engagement. This work has meant that our data is more robust and more reflective of the full breadth of Staffordshire’s people.
- This commissioned work sought to reach people living in areas of deprivation, people with disabilities, people from ethnic minority groups and people living in rural communities. Through additional separate work we also reached young people in the care system, those who have left it, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and foster carers.

The initial engagement stage ended in February. We are now evaluating the data and considering next steps to enrich the insight and consider how we could further engage with the community about this. This will include doing work to understand if there are any gaps in who we heard from, and how we reach those people.

The residents’ responses have clearly told us that they want stronger communication between the county council and its communities. We will be working to understand what this means for the various communities, and together with our partners and residents, this will be a major focus of the forthcoming Communities Strategy.

County Council Meeting – 14th March 2024**Question to Councillor Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People****Councillor Mike Wilcox, Cabinet Member for Health and Care****By Councillor Charlotte Atkins**

Question

How many adults and children in Staffordshire are waiting for their social care needs to be assessed or for a review of their care plan?

What is the average waiting time for that assessment? How do these figures for 2024 compare to those in 2023, 2022, 2021, 2020 and 2019?

Reply**Adults:**

The Council completes around 1200 Care Act assessments monthly. Our target is to complete 80% of these within 28 days. This has consistently been achieved with performance is reported to Cabinet quarterly as part of the Integrated Performance Report. The average time for a Care Act assessment to be completed is 24 days (12-month average). There have been no significant changes in performance over the last three years. The number of people with a Care Act pending completion is monitored in real time. Where these exceed 28 days managers check that this is due to legitimate reasons such as complex circumstances or individual wishes.

Around 10,000 people are receiving Council funded care. Our target is that 80% of them have been reviewed within the previous 12 months. This has consistently been achieved with performance is reported to Cabinet quarterly as part of the Integrated Performance Report. There have been no significant changes in performance over the last three years. More than 95% of people have been reviewed in the last 15 months.

[Integrated Performance Quarter 3 2023-24 Cabinet Report](#)

Children:

There is no one 'waiting' as our process is to allocate on referral and the assessment is launched at this point. An assessment is required to be concluded within 45 working days.

The number of first assessments that are in progress is 556.

There are 189 reviews out of timescale out of a total of 1284. The reason for the out of timescale can be the review having been done but not yet recorded on the system or parents/ carers or key people being unable to attend the review within the required timescale.
