

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 14 March 2024

Attendance		
Jak Abrahams	Syed Hussain	Bob Spencer
Arshad Afsar	Graham Hutton	Mike Sutherland
Charlotte Atkins	Thomas Jay	Mark Sutton
Philip Atkins, OBE	Julia Jessel	Stephen Sweeney
Gill Burnett-Faulkner	Peter Kruskonjic	Simon Tagg
Tina Clements	Tom Loughbrough-Rudd	Samantha Thompson
Richard Cox	Johnny McMahon	Carolyn Trowbridge
Mike Davies	Paul Northcott	Ross Ward
Mark Deaville	Jeremy Oates	Jill Waring
Janet Eagland	Gillian Pardesi	Alan White
Ann Edgeller	Ian Parry	Philip White
Alex Farrell	Kath Perry, MBE	Mike Wilcox
Keith Flunder	Jeremy Pert	Bernard Williams
Colin Greatorex	Jonathan Price	David Williams
Philippa Haden	Robert Pritchard	Mark Winnington
Phil Hewitt (Chairman)	James Salisbury	Mike Worthington
Jill Hood	Janice Silvester-Hall	Nigel Yates
Derrick Huckfield	David Smith	
Philip Hudson	Paul Snape	

Apologies: Gill Heath, Jason Jones, Bernard Peters, Conor Wileman, Ian Wilkes and Victoria Wilson

Part One

15. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

16. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 8 February 2024

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 8 February 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

17. Chairman's Correspondence

Former Clerk of the Council, Bernard Price DL

The Chairman informed the Council of the death, on 28 February, of former Clerk of the County Council, Bernard Price DL. Mr Price joined Staffordshire in September 1970 and, following a series of internal promotions, he was appointed County Clerk and Chief Executive of the

County Council from 1st April 1983. He held the post for twenty years until his retirement on 31st March 2003.

Mr Price was awarded the C.B.E. in 1997 for services to local government in Staffordshire. He was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Law by the University of Keele in 2001 "in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Staffordshire". Shortly after his retirement in 2003 he was appointed as a Deputy Lieutenant of the County.

Councillor Philip Atkins paid tribute to Mr Price for the valuable contribution he had made to the work of the Council following which Members stood and observed a one minute silence in his memory.

18. Statement of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work since the previous meeting of the Council.

Staffordshire Means Back to Business – Oral Update

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Councillor Charlotte Atkins referred to the Government's decision to cease funding Local Enterprise Partnerships from April and enquired as to whether the transfer of their functions to local council's came with any additional resources.

Councillor Hood referred to Staffordshire's excellent tourism offer with the large number and diversity of visitor attractions available across the County. She did however express concern in relation to public transport connectivity to those attractions and asked that this issue be looked into further. In response, Councillor Alan White indicated that the Council had a bus service improvement plan in place and was also working on a local transport plan.

Councillor Yates spoke about the on-going lobbying activity in respect of the Fifty500 corridor and asked that the County Council engage fully with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council on this matter, particularly in respect of the development of the Local Transport Plan. In response, Councillor Deaville referred to the importance of the Fifty500 corridor project and he, together with Councillor Alan White, confirmed that the County Council would work with the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to ensure that the Local Transport Plan provided for towns and villages to have appropriate highway links to access the corridor. Councillor Hudson also spoke about the importance of the Fifty500 corridor and extended his thanks to his local Member of Parliament for her support in moving the project forward.

Councillor Philip Atkins and Councillor Winnington referred to the important role played by the County Council, working with other organisations such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, in the delivery of major infrastructure projects such as the Branston Locks Interchange, i54 and the Stafford Western Access Road.

Councillor Hussain asked what more the County Council could do to help support those families on low incomes. In response, Councillor Philip White indicated that the claimant rate for Universal Credit in Staffordshire was lower than both the regional and national averages. He added that there were as many vacant jobs in the County as there were people claiming Job Seekers Allowance and that the Council continued to work hard to create well paid employment opportunities, but this did not mean to say that it could not do more. Councillor Alan White indicated that the Leaders' Board had also set up a work stream on tackling inequalities.

Councillor Smith commended the work of Local Enterprise Partnerships but indicated that it was right that their work was now to be incorporated into local councils. He added that it was important that local councils set up appropriate communication channels with the business sector to address their needs.

Homes for Children in our Care

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Councillor Pardesi and Councillor Edgeller stated that they welcomed the Council's decision to invest in six internal homes to disrupt the market and provide a home for the County's children with the most complex needs. Councillor Sutton thanked the Members for their comments and indicated that the new homes would give the council more flexibility, would ensure that the children placed there were closer to their families and would provide placements at a more realistic cost.

Green Solutions - SCC Delivery of the Pilot Business Energy Advice Service

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Councillor Philip White indicated that he welcomed the Council's decision to become the Primary Delivery Partner for the Stoke and Staffordshire region, to deliver Energy Assessments and Grants on behalf of the Pilot Business Energy Advice Service (BEAS) programme in the Stoke and Staffordshire region. The scheme would allow the Council to support 300 businesses with energy advice and £2M of grants to make improvements. He also asked Members to contact him if they were aware of any businesses which would benefit from the scheme.

House Waste Recycling Centres - Equipment Replacement Programme

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

Councillor Tagg informed Members of the proposals to procure 11 new wheeled excavators (JCBs) for the Household Waste Recycling Centre equipment renewal programme.

Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion - progress update

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Councillor Hussain spoke about racism and how it should have no place in society. He also spoke about the “disability pay gap” and enquired whether it was proposed to undertake a survey to assess its extent in Staffordshire. Councillor Hussain added that he was proud of this Council and its ongoing work to address inequalities. In response, Councillor Alan White indicated his condemnation of racism in any form and added that it was through dialogue that problems were solved.

Procurement of Gas Supplies

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Councillor Smith enquired as to whether it was possible for the Council to quantify its reductions in energy use as a result of its “green” policies. Councillor Yates spoke about instability in energy markets and its impact on businesses. He also spoke about the importance of investment in carbon reduction. In response, Councillor Deaville referred to measures the Council had taken in relation to carbon reduction including updating street lighting with LED bulbs.

Local Transport Fund

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

Councillor Edgeller referred to the traffic congestion in Stafford particularly when there was a closure of the M6 motorway between junctions 12 and 14 and indicated that National Highways needed to find a solution to address these issues. In response, Councillor David Williams indicated that, despite being notified of the roadworks on the A449 in Stafford, National Highways had failed to utilise appropriate diversion routes when the M6 was closed. He added that he had asked officers to take up this matter with National Highways.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins enquired as to how the Local Transport Fund monies would be allocated. She also expressed concern that only one month had been allocated for consultation on the Local Transport Plan. In response, Councillor David Williams indicated that, although it was aware of the allocations under the Fund for the next two years, the Council was waiting to hear as to how much it was to be allocated in future years.

Councillor Winnington referred to the importance of the Handsacre Link to

connect Stafford with HS2. He, together with Councillor Philip Atkins, also spoke about the need to improve Stafford Railway Station and public transport links.

Councillor Smith indicated that he hoped that some of the Local Transport Fund monies would be allocated to address the problem of “rat-running” in his Division. Councillor Cox referred to plans to upgrade Woodend Road to an “A” road and his hope that some of the Local Transport Fund monies could be used to complete the works. Councillor Yates spoke about the need to think about other road users, not just cars, and also measures to tackle congestion outside schools, when allocating the fund. In response, Councillor Alan White indicated that the funding would not be sufficient to meet all of the proposals being put forward and that there would be a need to prioritise those schemes which were the most beneficial for the County.

Councillor Philip White referred to the recent visit by Jeremy Quin MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, to view the Branston Interchange project which had been funded jointly by the Council and the private sector. He also spoke about how the Council was in discussion with Government Ministers on other major infrastructure projects.

Councillor McMahon spoke about the link between the environment and public health, for example, through reducing pollution. He, together with Councillor Alan White, also referred to the need for a change in culture to reduce car usage.

Walleys Quarry

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Councillor Huckfield referred to the ongoing issues at Walleys Quarry and the lack of an adequate response from the Environment Agency. He also asked that people write to the Minister to insist that the site is closed. Councillor Tagg indicated that he fully supported Councillor Huckfield in this matter and also expressed the view that a public inquiry should be held into the failure to address the issues at the quarry. He added that the site was due to cease operating in 2026 but that it was the view of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and local residents that this should be brought forward.

In response, Councillor Alan White expressed the opinion that it was a disgrace that the Environment Agency had not responded to the pleas for help to tackle the issues at the Quarry; and that the County Council would continue to support local residents.

Foster Carer Awards

(Paragraph 12 of the Statement)

Councillor Edgeller spoke about the importance of fostering and asked that anyone who was interested in fostering should come forward. Councillor Sutton also asked Members that, if they knew any foster carers who should be considered for the Foster Carer Awards, would they please nominate them.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Councillor Hood expressed her support for the programme but indicated that, unfortunately, some young people who had been allocated a place did not turn up. She added that there needed to be some way of having a cancellation register so that places were not wasted and could be offered to those who had just failed the eligibility criteria for attending the programme. In response, Councillor Sutton indicated that the criteria for attending the programme was very strict and places could only be offered to those in receipt of free school meals. He added that almost 200,000 places had been provided since the programme started in 2021. He also encouraged his fellow Members to promote the programme in their local communities.

School Places

(Paragraph 14 of the Statement)

Councillor Cox extended his congratulations to those members of staff dealing with school admissions following the recent announcement that nine out of ten parents were being allocated their first choice secondary school in Staffordshire. He also spoke about the decision of The Hart School in Rugeley to reduce the number of places at the school and the detrimental impact this would have on the allocation of first choice places. In response, Councillor Sutherland and Councillor Price indicated that The Hart School were offering as many places as they could and the difficulties with provision in the Rugeley area would be resolved when the new all-through school opened. Councillor Price also spoke about the Schools Capital Programme which ensured that sufficient school places were available across the County and provided for the building of new schools and improvements to existing ones.

Councillor Hudson indicated that he wanted to dismiss the false claims which were circulating in relation to the insufficiency of school place in Uttoxeter due to the increase in housing development. He added that the Council had taken housing growth into consideration when planning future school place provision.

Resolved – That the Statement of the Leader of the Council be received.

19. Pay Policy Statement 2024/25

The Council were informed that it was a legal requirement of the Localism Act 2011 for the County Council to have a Pay Policy statement which must be published annually before 31 March. Amongst other matters, the Statement must set out the authority's policies for the financial year relating to:

- a. The remuneration of its chief officers,
- b. The remuneration of its lowest-paid employees, and
- c. The relationship between –
 - (i) the remuneration of its chief officers, and
 - (ii) the remuneration of its employees who are not chief officers.

The Council received the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25.

Resolved – (a) That the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 (as set out in Annex A to the report) be approved.

(b) That it be noted that the ratio between the lowest paid and highest paid employee has reduced from 1:11 to 1:9.

20. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Councillor Edgeller extended her thanks to the Chief Fire Officer and his staff for the work they were doing in supporting the Health Service with regard to discharges from hospital.

Councillor Pardesi referred to the use of bodycams by Police Officers and indicated that there were too many examples where bodycams had been turned off.

Resolved – That the report be received.

21. Appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees

On the nomination of the Leader of the Council, it was:

Resolved – That Councillor Samantha Thompson be appointed Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

22. Questions

Councillor Yates asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

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.

Supplementary Question

Is there scope within the contract with Amey for the Council to directly employ sub-contractors who can be used in an emergency, or do we have to go through Amey?

Reply

Yes, we can bring in local contractors, but it is better done through our Infrastructure+ contract with Amey.

Councillor Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:-

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.

Supplementary Question

Knife crime has increased by 41% in the last twelve months. How can the County Council ensure that there is a consistent programme of awareness and education to tackle this issue?

Reply

The answer provided by Councillor Wilson goes into great detail about the Staffordshire Violence Reduction Strategy. There is also a lot of information on the website as to what partners are doing to tackle the issue. Crime with a bladed article accounts for just 1% of all recorded crime within the County. Please have a look at the website and if you have any further points, please contact Councillor Wilson.

Councillor Pardesi asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport whose reply is set out below the question:-

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.

Supplementary Question

What is so hard about understanding that underfunding means more disrepair on our roads which is going to cost even more the longer it is

left?

Reply

This Council is continuing to invest in our roads and has changed working practices through its transformation programme to make them more efficient. Last year alone, we completed over 16,000 pothole defect rectifications, over 100 miles of surface dressing and carried out more than ten capital maintenance schemes. I disagree with your comment as we have stopped the decline in our roads and are continuing to reduce the backlog of repairs.

Councillor Afsar asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture whose reply is set out below the question:-

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.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Health and Care whose reply is set out below the question:-

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.

Supplementary Question

Once the assessments have been done, do we have sufficient staff in place to deliver the social care which is so vital to our communities; and what is the current vacancy level within the social care workforce?

Reply

With regard to the vacancy rates, I do not have that information to hand and will therefore come back to you as soon as I can.

23. Petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

24. Exclusion of the Public

Resolved - That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 indicated below.

PART TWO

The Council then proceeded to consider a report on the following matter and took decisions thereon:

25. Employment Tribunal Matter (Exemption paragraph 1)

Chair