

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Staffordshire Means Back to Business

The Cabinet have received an oral report of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills giving an update on "Staffordshire Means Back to Business" activity including the following matters:

- This month saw an increase of 430 claimants in Staffordshire, whilst at the same time we have seen increases both regionally and nationally. This reflects the challenging economic conditions businesses continue to operate in across the country. The total number of claimants in the county now stands at 16,130 and the claimant rate has increased this month from 2.9% to 3.0% of the working age population. However, it is important to note that the claimant count rate in Staffordshire continues to be one of the lowest in the West Midlands, far lower than the average for the region of 5.1%, and lower than the average for England of 4.0%.
- The youth claimant count in Staffordshire saw an increase of 100 claimants this month to a total of 3,100 young people. Increases were also seen regionally and nationally. The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit has increased this month from 4.8% to 5.0%. Staffordshire continues to be lower than the national rate of 5.3% and far lower than the regional rate of 7.2%.
- Supporting the creation of new, high-quality employment opportunities is the central aim of our Economic Strategy and the growth of the logistics industry has been one of our successes in recent years. Since 2015, 7,000 new logistics jobs have been created within Staffordshire and our location at the centre of the country will mean that we will continue to be attractive to the industry. Our aim has always been to ensure that we are supporting the creation of the type of jobs that we want within Staffordshire, and it is therefore really encouraging to see that recent logistics developments are increasingly creating jobs that require high-level skills, such as artificial intelligence and robotics expertise.
- Over the coming years, the West Midlands Interchange scheme in South Staffordshire will bring 8,500 new jobs to the county and we are proactively engaged with partners on the scheme's delivery. Our Jobs and Careers service is working with Winvic, the lead constructor for phase 1 of the site, to showcase the development and promote different careers and pathways into the construction industry with our residents. As a rail-served logistics site, the West Midlands Interchange scheme will be a key part of the country's logistics

network and it is estimated that once fully operational it will reduce HGV travel on the national road network by around 50 million km each year, making a significant contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

- Recently GRIDSERVE Electric Forecourt have been granted planning approval to develop an electric vehicle charging station at our flagship i54 South Staffordshire business park, with only one plot now remaining on the western extension of the site. This will serve existing and future occupiers of the site, the wider area and users of the local road network and is the type of development that will be needed as we continue to move towards the greater use of electric vehicles.
- Burton and South Derbyshire College has recently opened its upgraded and revitalised facilities in Burton upon Trent's town centre. This has seen the creation of a range of innovative facilities including a Cyber Security Lab, Games Development Studio and Health Simulation Suite. These facilities will be vital if we are to prepare students for evolving demands of employers, with such developments also being important in the regeneration of our town centres.
- Alongside working with our local skills providers, the County Council also continues to support the development of the skills of our residents through our Community Learning Service which provides services for around 2,500 adult learners across Staffordshire every year, helping residents to upskill, access further learning and ultimately secure good quality jobs. The quality of the service has recently been recognised by achieving the international Matrix Standard, with the service being praised for helping people to understand their options, achieve their next steps and move towards further learning and employment.

(Cabinet – 17 April 2024)

2. Capital Programme for Schools 2024/25

The Cabinet have approved the Schools Capital Programme 2024/25. The Programme will see nearly £57 million spent on maintaining and improving Staffordshire schools to ensure Staffordshire children can learn in surroundings that enhance their education and give them the best possible start in life.

The funds will also be used to make schools more energy-efficient, directly contributing to the county council's goal of achieving net zero carbon emissions.

Some of this funding will also be used to deliver new school places and improve existing provision in schools for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is to ensure children and young people, irrespective of background, can access a good education that enables them to fulfil their potential.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

3. Highways and Transport Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27

The Cabinet have approved the Highways and Transport Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27.

Under the proposals, over the next three financial years the County Council is planning to carry out at least an extra £50 million worth of repairs and essential maintenance to Staffordshire's roads, on top of any grant given by government. This includes more road resurfacing schemes and getting potholes repaired quicker.

The investment will also enable 34 road reconstruction schemes to be carried out, including the resurfacing of junctions/roundabouts at key locations into our towns, 1.5 million sq. m of preventative surface treatments and £2.75M of work to repair highway drainage.

This year will also see more than £53 million invested in a range of major projects, vital local improvements, and general road maintenance.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

4. Climate Change Strategic Development Framework - Update

The first Climate Change Strategic Framework (the Strategic Framework) was published in 2021 and set out our approach for achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. We recognise reducing emissions in isolation is not enough and we must also build resilience into our services to the changing climate. The Cabinet have approved a revised Climate Change Strategic Development Framework which outlines our priorities for achieving our net zero ambition and how to better prepare ourselves and local communities for the changing climate.

The Climate Change Action Plan is also being refreshed to incorporate carbon reduction initiatives and building climate change resilience across all council services.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

5. Staffordshire County Council Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy and LEVI Update

The Department for Transport (DfT) has indicatively allocated the Council £4,588,000 capital funding to enable the private sector to deliver public electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in Staffordshire. The Cabinet have agreed to accept the funding which will enable the authority to facilitate and coordinate the private sector to improve accessibility of EV infrastructure for Staffordshire residents. It is projected that this grant funding, will unlock private sector investment of £10-£15m for Staffordshire. The grant requires the delivery of both off and on street charging infrastructure with a focus on on-street.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

6. Section 75 Agreement for Adult Social Care Assessment & Case Management and Occupational Therapy in Staffordshire

That Cabinet have agreed that the Council enters into a new Section 75 Agreement with Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust (MPFT) to continue to provide adult social care assessment and case management and occupational therapy in Staffordshire. This new agreement allows the Council to build on our long-running, successful partnership with MPFT. The partners have agreed in principle that the term of the new agreement will be three years (1 April 2025 – 31 March 2028) with the option to extend for a further two years (1 April 2028 – 31 March 2030).

It is recognised that during the life of the new Section 75 Agreement there is likely to be an increase in demand and complexity for adult social care services in line with the demographic trends of an ageing population. The Council and MPFT have agreed that an increase in demand will be managed within the existing resources through continuing to develop more efficient processes. In the event that either demand increases above this general trend, and/or either partner considers that there is insufficient capacity to continue to deliver the services to the required quality and performance standards, the partners will meet to agree how this will be jointly managed.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

7. Provision of Apprenticeship Services 2024

Last year 6,300 people started an apprenticeship in Staffordshire. Apprenticeships are also an important aspect of workforce development for the Council and we currently have over 100 apprentices doing 35 different subjects and a further 95 apprentices working in our grant-maintained schools.

As use of the Apprenticeship Levy becomes more established, and we use it to create a workforce with skills for both now and the future, we need access to a wide range of specialist training providers. The Cabinet have

therefore approved the appointment of Crown Commercial Services to make sure training is delivered by providers who have been approved and checked for due diligence and to make it more efficient to award and manage the increasing number of contracts.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

8. Staffordshire's All Age Carers Strategy 2024 - 2029

The Cabinet have a new All-Age Carers Strategy (2024-2029) to replace the current strategy. This new strategy has been produced in partnership with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and with direct input from carers themselves. In total, 412 unpaid carers contributed their views. This includes 379 adult carers, including parent carers and Council employees who are also carers, 20 young carers, and 13 families of young carers.

The new Strategy recognises the extraordinary contribution carers make up and down the county, and ensures they have the help and support they need. It also reflects how we will continue to seek the views of carers, and work with them to ensure they are aware of the support available and building access to support in their own communities.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

9. Extension to the Dynamic Purchasing System Agreement for the supply of Residential and Nursing Care home placements

The Council currently supports 3,392 adults to manage their assessed eligible social care needs in a care home. The Council procures these placements using a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). The DPS arrangements were due to expire on 31 March 2024 and the Cabinet have approved an extension to the DPS until 30 September 2024.

The Council is also developing a care home commissioning plan to meet the strategic objectives for commissioning residential and nursing care. It will include a new contract, new arrangements for procurement and a sustainable pricing strategy. The expectation is that this will be brought to Cabinet for consideration in summer 2024 and, if approved, would be implemented between 1 April and 1 October 2025.

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

10. Joint Enterprise Delivery Committee

The Cabinet have approved proposals to establish a Joint Committee, on behalf of Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council, to take all decisions within the budget and policy frameworks for both councils

arising from the winding down and cessation of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Local Enterprise Partnership (SSLEP).

Through the new joint committee, we will be a strong voice for businesses across our area, with a focus on securing funding for infrastructure development and future economic growth, both from government and private investors. The committee will also steer the work of the growth hub, careers hub and the newly established Local Visitor Economy Partnership, which will champion the county and city across the UK and internationally. The Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills are to be appointed as the Council's representatives on the Joint Committee.

The Cabinet have also approved proposals for the use of the SSLEP reserves for three key economic programmes: the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub, Careers Hub and recently announced Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP).

(Cabinet – 20 March 2024)

11. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 4, 2023/24

The Cabinet have received an overview of the Council's progress, performance, and financial position in delivering against its Strategic Plan, Delivery Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

They were informed that the latest revenue forecast outturn showed a forecast overspend of £4.0m (0.58%), compared to the Quarter 3 forecast overspend of £5.4m (0.9%).

Rising costs across the organisation and levels of demand and complexity of needs remained challenging, particularly in children's and families services and in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities where transport costs were rising significantly.

(Cabinet – 17 April 2024)

12. Staffordshire Day

May 1 saw the county enjoy Staffordshire Day once again, with many events running into the Bank Holiday weekend.

The annual event, to celebrate everything which is great about Staffordshire, is now in its ninth year.

Highlights this year included free tours of the Wedgwood Factory, a Great British Food Festival at The Trentham Estate and even an ABBA tribute festival at Uttoxeter Racecourse. In total there were 30 main events across

the county and it is always great to see people celebrating the Staffordshire story.

13. Film Office

Staffordshire is also set to become a prime location for film and television set production with backing from the county council.

With Cannock Chase, the Staffordshire Peak District, the canal network and its great town centres, the county will showcase its offer to global production companies at a new film office.

The Staffordshire Film Office is being launched and operated by We Are Staffordshire – the county’s place marketing organisation – which is made up of the county and all eight district and borough councils, as well as representatives from over 200 businesses including a private sector-led Place Board.

Film and TV production can help to raise Staffordshire’s profile on the national and international stage and play a part in growing the county’s economy and will go hand in hand with our own exciting plans for the countryside.

The film and TV production industry contributes approximately £6.3bn to the UK economy each year, and almost a third of visitors to the country are interested in going to location seen on screen. Film tourism in England generates £140million each year.

The Staffordshire Film Office will provide a single point of contact for production enquiries – providing information on locations, local support businesses and facilities, general advice and a speed up application processes, meaning companies will effectively have access to a one stop shop.

It will be fantastic to hopefully see Staffordshire on the big screen, or the small screen, in the not so distant future.

14. Drugs and Alcohol Partnership

Residents struggling with drug and alcohol issues in Staffordshire are set to benefit from a new partnership between the council and the NHS.

Addiction not only affects those battling with issues but often their families and friends too. The new partnership will see the Staffordshire Treatment and Recovery System (STaRS) run by the Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with the county council.

STaRS will also continue to work with fantastic BAC O'Connor and Betterway Recovery and Chase Recovery to help adults and young people who need support with drug and alcohol use.

This partnership, which is believed to be the first in the sector, will follow on from our earlier adult social care partnership with the trust.

15. Winter Recovery Plan

As you will be aware, this winter has been one of the wettest and stormiest on record, with six named storms and the highest rainfall in February ever recorded.

This has had a massive impact on highways across the UK, and the situation here in Staffordshire is no different.

Our crews did an excellent job last year to improve our roads, but because of the weather, we've seen a major increase in new reported defects compared to the same time last year. This means a lot of the fantastic progress we've made over the past 12 months has been undone.

After speaking with many of you and listening to our residents, it's clear we need to do something urgently to address this. That's why we are putting together a focused response—which we're calling our 'Post-Winter Highways Recovery Plan.' This will be a 12-month plan that will set out how we can get back on top of the defects.

As local members you have a key role to play in making this a success.

16. HS2

As a county council we were opposed to the high-speed link from the outset but determined to maximise the economic benefits and importantly minimise the impact on the project on our countryside and on our communities.

With work on the construction on the phase affecting the south of the county still going ahead, our focus remains the same – particularly to ensure that the Handsacre Link is constructed to allow HS2 compatible trains to go to London from the county.

While the phase to Manchester was cancelled by the Prime Minister, there were calls by the Mayors of the West Midlands and Greater Manchester for an alternative to go ahead.

We have made it absolutely clear that our position on HS2 remains unchanged and we will continue to make this clear to the combined

authorities in discussions with them and the mayors elected earlier this month.