

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Staffordshire Means Back to Business - Oral Update

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:

- Last month saw a decrease of -465 claimants, with the total number of claimants in the county now standing at 15,385 or 2.9%. The claimant count rate in Staffordshire continues to be one of the lowest in the West Midlands and is far lower than the average for the region of 4.9%, and lower than the average for England of 3.8% of the working age population. The youth claimant count in Staffordshire saw a decrease of -40 claimants to a total of 2,870 young people. The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit has remained the same this month at 4.6%. This is lower than the national rate of 4.9% and far lower than the regional rate of 6.6%, both of which also remained at the same level this month. These decreases coincide with a significant 26% increase in job vacancies seen between April and May, both in Staffordshire and nationally.
- The Staffordshire Jobs & Careers service to support people to find a job and help businesses to find suitable employees now has six Employment Brokers in post with a 7th Broker to be recruited in the Summer to specifically support employment and training needs related to the West Midlands Interchange scheme.
- The Staffordshire Jobs & Careers Service website continues to be well publicised, and the team continue to develop promotional materials and messaging to promote the service.
- We are in the process of developing updated communications to support our Open Door Staffordshire programme, which continues to support work placements within the County Council and external organisations. Since April 2022 the team have supported 47 Open Door candidates to start a placement, with eight going on to secure paid employment to date.
- To support the delivery of our overarching Economic Strategy, we are currently developing a new Employment and Skills Strategy for Staffordshire with the support and input from our skills providers and partners. This will be used to guide our future employment and skills work programmes, support external funding bids, enable effective communication of Staffordshire's shared employment and skills goals

and to inform the development of other relevant skills plans and actions as appropriate.

- Developing higher-level technical skills is one of the emerging priorities of our Employment & Skills Strategy, and the growth of high-quality apprenticeships will be key to us achieving this. Our partners have recently relaunched The Ladder for Staffordshire, previously established to support Apprenticeship growth across Staffordshire, with the aim to secure 1,500 individuals as a minimum onto an apprenticeship across the county by January 2025.
- Staffordshire's recent success in the National VisitEngland Awards for Excellence where three of our visitor economy businesses collected awards, most notably the National Memorial Arboretum won Gold for Business Events Venue of the Year. Also, the Duncombe Arms for Pub of the Year and Trentham Gardens for Unsung Hero who both brought home Bronze.

(Cabinet 21 June 2023)

2. Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) Consultation Feedback, Policy Changes, Re-use and HWRC Network Improvements to Date

Since the HWRC service moved in-house, it has been identified that there has been a significant increase in the disposal of bulky and trade waste, particularly at the Cannock site (the largest HWRC within the network) which has increased disposal costs putting pressure on existing budgets. Following public consultation, the Cabinet have approved policy changes to control the use of the Council's HWRC network and minimise both operational and financial pressures and to reflect operational changes since the network came in-house. These changes also aim to address the issue of queuing on HWRC sites due to trade waste vehicles taking space and considerable time to offload waste. Permits will be issued to Staffordshire residents with vans or trailers and sites will only accept trade waste from within Staffordshire. There will be no change to Staffordshire residents disposing of waste in cars and disposal of non-chargeable items will remain the same for both residents requiring and not requiring permits.

(Cabinet 17 May 2023)

3. Household Support Fund (HSF)

On 30 September 2021, the DWP announced a new HSF Grant which will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need this Winter. The County Council has the discretion on exactly how this £11,013,096.00 funding is used, providing it

adheres to the funding criteria. These conditions have changed each time but there remains a commitment to:

- The majority of funding being targeted at low-income households; however support is not restricted to those households in receipt of benefits.
- Prioritise the support for households in the most need with food, energy, and water bills.
- More recently a referral route must be available to allow for targeted residents to benefit in addition to the identified schemes.

The Cabinet have considered the impact of the delivery of the Household Support Fund (HSF) grant on local residents to date and have approved the planned proposals for the usage of the HSF in Staffordshire for the financial year 2023/24.

(Cabinet 17 May 2023)

4. Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council

The Council currently has over 500 regular volunteers who support the work of the Authority. Following feedback and learning from our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Communities Leadership Group undertook a review of how we support people who volunteer for the Council. The Task & Finish group included representatives from our VCSE Capacity Building Framework Partners, Support Staffordshire, and Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS), as well as commissioning leads and managers from across the authority who support volunteers.

As a result of this review, the Cabinet have agreed that the Council should adopt the following nine new 'volunteering principles' together with practical guidance documents for staff, ensuring that everyone who volunteers with the Council is supported to have a positive and consistent experience:

- Have clearly defined expectations, roles, and boundaries for all our volunteers.
- Be inclusive and accessible for all residents who want to get involved.
- Be flexible where possible, with different opportunities depending on how much time people can offer.
- Be personalised, taking into account the different experiences, skills, motivations and capabilities of each volunteer.
- Ensure our volunteering opportunities are mutually beneficial for both volunteers and the Council's work within communities.
- Ensure volunteers have the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences with the Council.
- Have volunteer focussed policies and processes, including recruitment, induction, and training.

- Recognise the positive contribution of our volunteers.
- Co-ordinate our approach to volunteering with existing Council resources, such as Open Door, Staffordshire Connects, and #DoingOurBit.

(Cabinet 21 June 2023)

5. Joint Coroners Service - Legal Framework and Financial Protocol

The Cabinet have approved the Heads of Terms for the Legal Framework for Staffordshire County Council to enter a partnership with Stoke on Trent City Council to allow the operation of a joint Coroner's service through the Joint Executive Committee, subject to a similar resolution being passed by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, and subject to Ministerial sign off, be approved.

It is expected that the merger will not only help improve services for bereaved families, but would also provide opportunities for efficiency savings, ensuring that the service is sustainable and fit for the future. Inquests will continue to be heard in both Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent, however there will be the potential to use other sites and locations under the new joint service.

The proposal links in with wider Ministry of Justice aspirations to merge smaller services which helps create a more consistent service and results in more coroner's areas being of a similar size and population.

The Director of Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, has been given delegated authority, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture, to take all steps necessary to enable the Joint Agreement.

(Cabinet 21 June 2023)

6. Community Learning Ofsted Inspection and Accountability Agreement 2023-2024

Ofsted carried out a 'full' inspection of the Council's Community Learning Service between 31 January to February 2023. The Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders and examining documentation and records. Key judgements were applied as follows:

- Overall effectiveness - Good
- The quality of education - Good
- Personal development - Good

- Leadership and management - Good
- Safeguarding - Effective

The Cabinet have commended the outcome of the inspection which provides an assurance that we are providing a quality service to our learners; and has also helped us identify ways in which we can further develop and improve our provision. The findings will also be used to set out our plan for the service for the coming year in the accountability agreement, including key aims, targets and outcomes that demonstrate our contribution to local skills needs.

(Cabinet 21 June 2023)

7. Integrated Performance - Performance and Finance Final Outturn Report 2022/23

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 noted that the final outturn position was an overspend of £11.294m. (The Quarter 3 forecast was an overspend of £11.635m).

Significant progress was made across the organisation during 2022/23, with inflation and cost of living pressures continuing to be responded to, whilst also delivering key programmes of work. Levels of demand presented challenges, particularly in Children and Families and Adult Social Care, including responding to adult social care market pressures and cost pressures within the Children's Social Care market.

(Cabinet 21 June 2023)

8. Framework Agreement for Maintenance and Minor Works

The Cabinet have given their approval to the commencement of a procurement exercise to procure a framework agreement for the provision of planned and reactive maintenance and minor works. (The scope of the framework agreement also includes for, Building, Electrical and Mechanical works). The total procurement will be qualified for up to £50 million to consider flexibility in the council's spend and to accommodate any potential additional spend of public sector partners. There is an appetite from Stafford Borough Council, Cannock Chase District Council and South Staffordshire Council to use the framework once it is live.

(Cabinet 21 June 2023)

9. Centre for Asylum Seekers in Stafford

Following a public inquiry, an appeal by Serco to accommodate asylum seekers in former student accommodation has been upheld.

While we are awaiting further details of timescales etc our priority now is to work with Serco, Stafford Borough Council and other partners to ensure local services can manage and that the asylum seekers receive the support they need during their time in the county.

This is a large-scale proposal and will be able to accommodate around 500 people, which is likely to be young, single adults, on a temporary basis.

10. Ironman 70.3 Staffordshire

As a county council, we were proud to introduce the first Ironman 70.3 to Staffordshire and it has become a regular feature in our calendar. This year was once again another fantastic event.

We were therefore sorry to hear that the Ironman Group has decided to discontinue the event and this year's will be the last.

As a former competitor myself, I know many people will share in the disappointment but, I would like to take this opportunity to thank residents, businesses, organisers and volunteers who have been involved over the years for their support.

11. Coronation

The Coronation seems some time ago now, but recently we had the chance to meet our own Staffordshire Coronation babies.

Babies born on the day of the Coronation received a special commemorative cup and I was delighted that so many of the families were able to join us here in County Buildings to receive their gift.

12. Armed Forces Day and Windrush 75

In Staffordshire, we have a special relationship with our armed forces – and with the people who served in them.

Armed Forces Day last month presented the county with an opportunity to show its support for the services with an event at Shire Hall to showcase the support that is available to armed forces communities.

Last month also marked 75 years since the arrival of the HMT Empire Windrush in Tilbury Docks in 1948, bringing 800 passengers from The Caribbean.

We joined the nation in recognising the huge contribution the Windrush generation played in shaping modern day Britain.

13. Fostering Communities

Another of our Staffordshire communities which we are incredibly proud of is our fostering community. These families make an immeasurable difference to the lives of children and young people.

Many of these were honoured at our long service awards ceremony recently, including Jeanette McInnes who has fostered for an amazing 40 years and welcomed more than 70 children into her home. I am delighted to hear too that Jeanette has no plans to give up just yet.

Our foster families do wonderful work and I would encourage anyone who is interested to contact us to find out more.

14. School Crossing Patrols

Our school crossing patrol service celebrates its 70th year. Established in 1953, The fashion may have slightly changed over the years, but the team's dedication day in and day out remains as strong.

We have more than 200 patrols ranging in age from 26 to 83. So, a huge congratulations and huge thank you to them all.

15. The Samaritans

Looking forward a little, and talking of wonderful work, The Samaritans will be celebrating their 70th Anniversary in November this year.

They currently have around 22,000 volunteers and more than 200 branches and locations across the UK and Ireland. Every 10 seconds, Samaritans respond to a call for help.

To show appreciation and recognition of their work in Staffordshire, I would encourage all members to work with their local communities to plant a tree in all 60 of the County's Electoral Divisions.