

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 18 May 2023

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

Apologies: Jak Abrahams, Julia Jessel, Jason Jones, Samantha Thompson, Carolyn Trowbridge and Conor Wileman.

Part One

1. Election of the Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year

Councillor Snape moved, and Councillor Haden seconded, and it was:

Resolved – That Councillor Phil Hewitt be elected Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year.

2. Declarations of Interest under Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meetings held on 16 March and 13 April 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings of the County Council held on 16 March and 13 April 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4. Election of the Vice-Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year

Councillor Peters moved, and Councillor Worthington seconded, and it was:-

Resolved – That Councillor Colin Greatorex be appointed Vice-Chairman of the County Council for the ensuing year.

5. Chairman's Correspondence

There were no items of Chairman's Correspondence on this occasion.

6. 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 Smith referred to recent developments in Lichfield including the proposed provision by BP of 20 new electric vehicle charging points, Bloor Homes' regional headquarters and a proposed 10 acre site for high-tech manufacturing units. Councillor Yates referred to the Chatterley Valley West site in Newcastle-under-Lyme and also asked that the County Council support the provision of new development sites in the Staffordshire Moorlands.

Councillor Hussain indicated that many high streets were struggling to attract and retain shops and businesses and he asked what could be done to address this issue. In response, Councillor Philip White referred to the £200m investment by the Government through its Town Deals, Future High Streets and Levelling-Up funding. He added that town centres were a priority for the County Council and outlined how the Authority was working in partnership with the District and Borough Councils.

Councillor Pert referred to the opening of the new Pets At Home Distribution Centre near Stafford and the employment opportunities the development would generate.

Councillor Winnington enquired about whether it was still proposed that a rail freight facility would be provided as part of the West Midlands Interchange proposals.

Councillor Philip White also referred to the Council's Employment and Skills Strategy which was currently out for consultation.

Capital Programme for Schools 2023/24 (Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Councillor Yates referred to SEND provision in the Staffordshire Moorlands including the recent creation of a SEND Parents Group. He also welcomed the support for SEND provision contained in the Capital Programme.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins indicated that it was becoming clear that Leek could only sustain one High School and she enquired as to how the capital programme could be utilised to facilitate this. In response, Councillor Price indicated that he would be happy to meet with Councillor Atkins to discuss this matter further.

Councillor Winnington welcomed the proposals for a new primary school at Burleyfields, Stafford. In response, Councillor Price indicated that the construction of the new school was due to commence in April 2024.

Councillor Philip Atkins spoke about the need to develop new schools where there was demand for additional places due to new housing developments.

Councillor Francis commented on the excellent SEND provision at Marshlands School in Stafford which was amongst the best in the Country.

Councillor Price indicated that the Capital Programme contained proposals amounting to £43m of which support for SEND provision totalled £13.3m. He also added that a consultation was currently taking place on future SEND provision and he encouraged all Members to get involved.

Highways and Transport Programme 2023/24 and Pothole Funding

(Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Statement)

Councillor Hudson, Councillor Afsar and Councillor Loughborough-Rudd welcomed the funding being made available under the Highways and Transport Programme. They also spoke about the need for Amey to keep to agreed timescales and to ensure that works undertaken were completed to a satisfactory standard. Councillor Loughborough-Rudd added that he would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further with the Cabinet Member.

Councillor Philip Atkins spoke about the potential impact of the proposals to permit longer HGVs on UK roads. Councillor Smith added that many

of the County's roads were not designed to take the types and volume of vehicles which currently used them.

Councillor Yates extended his thanks to Councillor David Williams for meeting with him recently to discuss highway issues within Biddulph and the surrounding area. He also expressed concern about potential slippage of some proposed schemes/works; he suggested that the draft Maintenance/Surface Treatment Plan should be shared with Members for their consideration prior to its approval; and asked that consideration be given to the implementation of more "Safer Routes to School" schemes when finances permitted.

Councillor Worthington referred to poor condition of the A520 in Leek and the quality of some of the works undertaken by Amey.

Councillor Flunder expressed his thanks to his Local Highways Team for the work undertaken in Biddulph and surrounding area.

Councillor Sutherland spoke about the proposed funding being made available to improve walking/cycling routes between Cannock Town Centre and the McArthur Glen Designer Outlet.

Councillor Clements and Councillor Snape referred to the recent seminar for Members on the Highways Transformation Programme and they encouraged all Members to work closely with their respective Local Highway Team.

Councillor Huckfield welcomed the funding being made available under the Highways and Transport Programme.

Councillor David Williams extended his thanks to Members for their comments. He also spoke about the progress of the Highways Transformation Programme which included revisions to the contractual arrangements with Amey and the determination to increase the quality of repair works.

Councillor Alan White spoke about the need to continue to lobby Central Government to try to secure adequate funding to support the County's highways network.

Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

Councillor Northcott outlined the principles behind the Strategy and explained that implementation of the action plan would be monitored by the Health and Wellbeing Board. He also referred to the importance of the Strategy as it had been found that mental health issues amongst the

population had increased since the start of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins referred to NHS reductions in funding for mental health services at community level and enquired as to what action could be taken by the Health and Wellbeing Board to address this issue.

Councillor Hood referred to the impact which working from home could have on an individual's mental health due to a reduction in socialisation. She also highlighted that the cost-of-living crisis was affecting many people's mental health and spoke about the need for increased investment in mental health services.

Councillor Pert indicated that the Strategy was not just about adults as it also covered children and young people. He highlighted that one in every ten people suffered from an anxiety disorder and that £5.5m was being invested in mental health services in Staffordshire. He also extended his thanks to Councillor Edgeller, the Council's mental health champion, for her on-going work in this area.

Councillor Edgeller welcomed the Strategy and extended her thanks to those persons involved in its preparation. She added that she was lobbying her MP in relation to securing more funding for mental health services; and encourage other Members of the Council to do the same.

Councillor Loughborough-Rudd spoke about his own experience of accessing mental health services and his concerns about the length of waiting lists for some services. He supported the call for more funding in this area.

Councillor Cox also highlighted the increase in mental health issues in the population, some of which he felt were due to lifestyle changes.

Councillor McMahon indicated that the Resolution Foundation had found that between all income brackets the degree of emotional distress post Covid varied between 30% at the highest and 46% at the lowest. He also paid tribute to the vital role played by the voluntary sector, such as "Andy's Man Club", of which there were now 120 across the Country, in supporting people with mental health issues. Councillor McMahon also referred to the impact of people leading more isolated lives.

Councillor Philip Atkins spoke about mental health in the farming sector, which saw around three suicides per week, and the support available through the Farming Community Network.

Councillor Francis referred to internet fraud, how those who were subject to fraud often suffered from mental health issues as a

consequence and the need for Central Government to do more to tackle this issue.

Councillor Hussain spoke about the how social media could have an adverse effect on an individual's mental health and he outlined the support available to Members where they were being targeted through social media.

Councillor Sutton indicated that in the vast majority of suicides cases were not known to mental health services. He also outlined how the Health and Wellbeing Board was working with the NHS to implement and monitor delivery of the Mental Health and Mental Wellbeing Strategy. He also spoke about how the Council had contracted with "Action for Children" to provide support to around 1,800 children per year.

Councillor Alan White also extended his thanks to Councillor Edgeller for her on-going work as the Council's mental health champion. He also encouraged staff and colleagues to ensure they achieved a work life balance by taking a break from dealing with emails outside of working hours.

Our People Strategy 2023 and Beyond

(Paragraph 6 of the Statement)

Councillor Yates stated that he applauded the quality, knowledge and enthusiasm of the Council staff he had come into contact with since being elected to the Authority. He also spoke about staff retention and succession planning and the need for the Council to take a lead on the promotion of "T Level" qualifications.

Councillor Alan White and Councillor Hewitt extended their thanks to all County Council staff for the work that they do.

Staffordshire County Council Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

(Paragraph 7 of the Statement)

Councillor Charlotte Atkins enquired as to what difference the revised strategy would make to those residents affected by flooding issues; and whether those residents would in future receive a better, more coordinated response.

Councillor Philip Atkins spoke about the range of agencies involved in dealing with flooding issues. Councillor Smith and Councillor Pert also spoke about the need for the various Councils and agencies to work in partnership to deliver solutions.

Councillor Flunder referred to works in his divisions to deal with flooding and drainage issues. Councillor Yates and Councillor Huckfield also referred to the need to upgrade old sewer systems which were no longer fit for purpose; and Councillor Francis spoke about the impact of rainwater running-off new housing developments.

Councillor Tagg thanked Members for their comments and indicated that there had been 15 significant storm events in Staffordshire since 2000. He added that there had been a positive response to the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and he also extended his thanks to the Council's Flood Management Team and also partner organisations and local groups.

Staffordshire Better Care Fund 2022 - 2024

(Paragraph 8 of the Statement)

Councillor Pardesi referred to the Social Care Workforce Strategy and whether this included proposals to increase pay above the rate of inflation to those working in the sector. She also enquired as to what was meant by "helping to support the recruitment and retention of home care staff by offsetting some cost pressures".

Councillor Hood asked whether the Leader was aware of a case in her Division whereby a provider had withdrawn the services to an individual at short notice and the replacement services put in place by the Council were not adequate.

Councillor Sutton thanked Councillor Pardesi and Councillor Hood for their comments and stated that he would ask Councillor Jessel to respond to them following the meeting.

Councillor Alan White added that, with regard to Councillor Pardesi's question about what was meant by "helping to support the recruitment and retention of home care staff by offsetting some cost pressures", this was explained in paragraph 9(b) of the Cabinet report. With regard to her question on pay increases, Councillor White indicated that the Council had awarded a recurrent fee uplift of 12% from April 2022 to reflect cost pressures facing home care providers.

With regard to the question raised by Councillor Hood, Councillor Alan White indicated that he would ask Mrs McIver, the Council's Assistant Director Public Health and Prevention, to pick this issue up with her following the meeting.

Staffordshire Day and Coronation

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Councillor Tagg, Councillor Hood and Councillor Snape spoke about the local community events that had taken place in their respective areas over the Coronation weekend.

Councillor Snape and Councillor Cox also extended their thanks to Councillor Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture, for allowing the Members Community Fund grants to be used to support local events/celebrations during the Coronation weekend.

Councillor Hussain spoke about how some volunteer organisations were struggling to keep their doors open due to inflationary pressures and expressed the hope that the County Council would do whatever it could to assist them.

Councillor Wilson thanked Members for their comments and added that the County Council was to present a commemorative mug to the parents the 14 babies born in Staffordshire on 6 May. She also paid tribute to the vital role played by volunteers and announced that the Council would shortly be launching a new Volunteering Framework which aimed to ensure that everyone who volunteers with the Council is supported to have a positive and consistent experience.

UKREiiF

(Paragraph 11 of the Statement)

Councillor Alan White spoke about the Council's attendance at the UK Real Estate Infrastructure and Investment (UKREiiF) Conference in Leeds which provided an opportunity for the Council to raise the profile of the county and to explain to developers and investor why Staffordshire was such a great place to do business.

And Finally

(Paragraph 13 of the Statement)

Members extended their thanks to Mr Henderson for the contribution he had made during the eight years he had served as the Council's Chief Executive, particularly for his leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic, and wished him well for the future.

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

7. Staffordshire Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee - The Code of Joint Working - Local Authorities

The Council considered the revised Code of Joint Working Arrangements with District and Borough Councils for Health Scrutiny. The Code had

been reviewed and refreshed to develop the health scrutiny function across Staffordshire and to foster good relationships with District and Borough Council scrutiny committees and Health Partners.

Resolved – (a) That the revised Code of Joint Working Arrangements (Joint Code) with District and Borough Councils for Health Scrutiny be approved.

(b) That the constitution be amended to include the following wording:

a. The Council has agreed a Code of Joint Working between the District/ Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council in relation to Overview and Scrutiny of health matters.

b. In accordance with the agreed code:

i. the County Council shall discharge the overview and scrutiny function under the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and subsequent guidance including the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013.

ii. the [*Borough/District*] Chairman of the [*relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee*] Committee will be appointed to Staffordshire County Council's Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

iii. the County Council is entitled to appoint one of its members to the [*relevant Borough/District Overview & Scrutiny Committee*] in relation to health matters.

8. Annual Report of the Audit and Standards Committee 2022/23

The Council considered the Annual Report of the Audit and Standards Committee 2022/23.

Councillor Worthington extended his thanks to the Council's Internal Audit Team for the work that they do.

Resolved – That the contents of the Annual Report of the Audit & Standards Committee for 2022/23 be approved.

9. Committee Membership

Cllr Alan White moved, and Cllr Philip White seconded, and it was:

Resolved – That the Members indicated on the attached schedule be

appointed to serve on the Committees listed for the period up to the Annual Council meeting in 2024.

10. Appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees and Panels

Cllr Alan White moved, and Cllr Philip White seconded, the nominations for the appointment of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees.

Resolved – That the under-mentioned be appointed as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committees stated for the period up to the annual Council meeting in 2024:-

Committee

Chairman

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman - Overview
Vice-Chairman - Scrutiny

Colin Greatorex
Samantha Thompson
Gill Heath

Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman - Overview
Vice-Chairman - Scrutiny

Jeremy Pert
Richard Cox
Ann Edgeller

Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman - Overview
Vice-Chairman - Scrutiny

Tina Clements
Peter Kruskonjic
Ross Ward

Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman - Overview
Vice-Chairman - Scrutiny

Bob Spencer
Gill Burnett-Faulkner
Paul Snape

Planning Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Mark Winnington
David Smith

Pensions Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Mike Sutherland
Mike Davies

Audit and Standards Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Mike Worthington
Carolyn Trowbridge

Corporate Parenting Meeting

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Mark Sutton
John Francis

Charities and Trusts Committee

Chairman
Vice-Chairman

Paul Snape
David Smith

11. Appointment of members to Outside Bodies 2023/24

Cllr Alan White moved, and Cllr Philip White seconded, and it was:

Resolved - That the nominations of the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Political Group Leaders, on the appointment of Members to Outside Bodies for 2023/24 be approved and that the Leader be authorised to make any changes to those appointments as may become necessary.

12. Questions

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

Question

I have been promoting the use of the MyStaffs mobile device app to residents, it has come to my attention that the current version cannot be installed using the latest android software. Could the portfolio holder please ensure that the App is updated so that it can be

downloaded universally across commonly used hardware platforms, and a “test and review” procedure is introduced to ensure that the compatibility of the App keeps pace with device software upgrades.

Reply

On the 22nd of March 2023 Google and Apple updated their terms and conditions and subsequently required us to undertake a review of the data captured by the MyStaffs App and re-apply to be listed on the Google Play Store and Apple App Store. This work was carried out and the MyStaffs App was successfully relisted. Testing was undertaken to check it was working on Android and Apple devices and no issues were identified.

This is the first issue that has been raised with us on this and officers are now investigating and working to resolve it. Once we have identified the problem and it’s cause we will ensure that this doesn’t happen again. In the interim all the services provided by the MyStaffs App are still available via the Council’s website.

Supplementary Question

What I would like to see is the app linked to “What Three Words” so that when a person logs an issue in real time it also automatically includes a precise location.

Reply

That is a good idea, and I will ask officers to have a look to see if we could make this work.

Councillor Pritchard asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Just two weeks ago Staffordshire was united in celebration of the coronation of our new monarch, His Majesty King Charles III.

Street parties and celebrations took place across Staffordshire, including in Tamworth town centre and Borough Road in my Division.

Local businesses also got involved by decorating their premises and holding events.

Clare Lee, at the Tam O Shanter in my division, threw open her doors to host a free family fun day for the local community.

Would the Leader join me in congratulating everyone who made these wonderful events happen for the coronation, including by community champions like Clare Lea at the Tam O Shanter?

Reply

It was fantastic to see people, businesses and organisations all over Staffordshire coming together to celebrate the coronation, once again emphasising the community spirit, patriotism and pride people take in their local areas.

So yes, I would also pay tribute to and congratulate Clare Lea and everyone who contributed to another memorable weekend, hot on the heels of our latest Staffordshire Day celebrations.

Over the last four weeks the county council counted down to the coronation across our social media channels and through the media, promoting local events and street parties, and the array of volunteering as part of the Big Help Out.

Our libraries marked the occasion with a giveaway of commemorative bookmarks and wildflower seeds. And we will be giving every Staffordshire baby born on 6th May a commemorative mug – we are inviting their parents to an event here in county buildings in the coming weeks.

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

Question

When will it be accepted that it is not sustainable to expect Amey alone to deliver in a timely fashion?

Reply

The highways service already uses a range of different providers, including EoN for street lighting, SWARCO for traffic signals, a number of Borough and District Councils for grass cutting and other environmental maintenance activities, and of course Amey for a wide range of day-to-day operational activities. Furthermore, the Amey workforce is typically made up of around a 50/50 mix of directly employed local operatives and a wide range of local subcontractors. Around 85% of all expenditure through the Amey contract remains within Staffordshire and neighbouring authority areas.

Working in partnership with a tier 1 national provider like Amey provides the county council many benefits, including added Resilience, Scale of Economy and Buying Power. It means that when additional funding becomes available, like it did last summer when Cabinet committed to the first year of £15m extra investment to fix more roads, we are well placed to respond quickly and competitively to bring on-board the extra capacity needed to ensure delivery and value for money for our residents.

With the extra investment being made by the county council over the next two years extra sub-contract resources will again be brought in. These include specialist resurfacing and surface treatments teams, extra pothole repair teams - including the specialist velocity patcher and thermal patching techniques, continuation of the additional Member priorities gully emptying team and additional drainage repair teams.

It's also worth mentioning that as part the ongoing Highways Transformation Programme we are currently moving to a new Hybrid-Mixed-Economy operating model. Whilst retaining the benefits of having a Tier 1 strategic delivery partner the new model will also provide the council with much greater control and assurance of the highway service. Under the new model each separate function, from carriageways to footways and from drainage to winter gritting, will each have its own politically agreed budget, service level, specification and performance requirements, including Quality, Customer Service and Value for Money. Delivering on Members priorities will be a key design feature of the new model.

Cabinet have reviewed the options and agree that the fastest, most efficient way to transition and start to realise the benefits of this new model is to extend our relationship with Amey – but on very different contracting terms:

- a. Under the new arrangement a lot of inspection, works prioritisation and quality assurance activity has already been moved back in house and is now being managed directly by the council;
- b. And even though it's a 5-year contract – under the new arrangement Amey are not guaranteed any work. If any element of activity is under-performing, or we feel things can be done better in a different way, then we retain the freedom to move functions into new arrangements, for example in-house or through a new delivery partner.

Amey have recently been sold and their new owners are really excited and want to work with us on innovative new solutions. They like the

look of this new model and are confident it will help them to demonstrate to us and others in the sector the added value they offer.

All that being said even with infinite resources and the best possible delivery model available, we still can't always do everything as quickly as we would like to. Roadworks are, by their very nature, disruptive. Our own operations actually only make up only about 1/3rd of all activity that takes place on the road network, with utility providers, including the major fibre roll out, making up the majority of the rest. It takes careful management to plan and co-ordinate activity to minimise delays and prevent as far as possible traffic diverting on to inappropriate local routes.

Despite these challenges fixing more roads is a priority for this council. I along with all other Cabinet Members and the highways team really appreciate the support from local members in helping us to achieve this goal.

Supplementary Question

In light of the extra £15m investment, can I now safely tell my residents that they can expect potholes to be fixed more quickly than they have up until now?

Reply

You can tell the residents that you will be more accountable for the prioritisation of what gets done in your area.

Councillor Charlotte Atkins asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND) whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

What assessment has the County Council made of the impact of the National Tutoring Programme in Staffordshire to help young people struggling to catch up after the disruption to their schooling caused by Covid lockdowns? How many pupils received tutoring under the scheme last year in Staffordshire and in which schools? What is the predicted take up of such tutoring in 2023 now that the government subsidy has been cut from 60% to 25%? Has the attainment gap for GCSEs in Staffordshire widened for disadvantaged pupils?

Reply

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) provides primary and secondary schools with funding to support targeted academic support, delivered by trained and experienced tutors and mentors. The overall approach to the NTP in the 2022 to 2023 academic year is to allow schools to design and deliver a tutoring offer that suits the needs of their school and pupils. The DfE has provided schools with a range of information to support them in delivering this programme.

Over 75% of pupils (85% in schools deemed secondary) are now being educated within academies which are no longer under the control of the local authority. It is for schools and academies to evaluate the impact of their tutoring programme, and as part of their evaluation of the quality of education and leadership and management, Ofsted inspectors will consider how schools make effective use of tutoring.

The virtual school has been working with school to use the funding to provide tuition support for the pupils in care, working with relevant schools as necessary. The additional tutoring is reviewed as part of the pupil's personal education plan (PEP).

The local authority has provided funding to independent special schools to enable them to provide tutoring for eligible Staffordshire pupils.

Attainment 8

In 2022, Staffordshire disadvantaged pupils Attainment 8 score increased by 0.9 points from 2019, which was in line with the increase seen nationally.

Pupils achieving GCSE Grade 5+ in E+M

In 2022, Staffordshire disadvantaged pupils achieving GCSE 5+ in E+M increased by 5 percentage points from 2019, this was in line with the increase nationally which also increased by 5 percentage points.

Supplementary Question

In view of the widening attainment gap between the most disadvantaged pupils and the rest, I am a bit concerned that the County Council doesn't have a greater oversight of what is actually happening in schools. Do you share my concerns that the County Council should really have greater oversight of what's going on?

Reply

I will provide you with a full written response.

Councillor Hussain asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Plant trees to make the world a better place. We must do more. Can the Cabinet Member tell us that he would go to whatever length to promote tree planting, particularly after plantation care? Unfortunately, many plants are destroyed within the first few months after being planted. What more would he do to guarantee a long-term tree planting and balanced tree growth?

Reply

The benefits of trees are wide and varied from slowing down flood pressures and ensuring that we enhance biodiversity, the benefits of trees are felt for generations.

As part of our commitment to reduce the Councils carbon emissions, we are exploring where potential lies to plant trees and diversify habitats to sequester carbon dioxide and mitigate some of our carbon footprint.

Over the past couple of years we have planted thousands of native trees on our land.

Whilst tree planting is a hugely beneficial act, we need to be mindful in balancing the various demands on our countryside for the benefit of our communities.

Whenever trees are planted, a balanced and proper maintenance programme should be entered into. However, sometimes unforeseen circumstances such as last years unprecedented heatwave catch even the most experienced land managers out.

With climate change in mind and the increased pressures that our natural environments is under from weather extremes and increased attacks from plant pathogens, diseases, and pests, we need to carefully consider the resilience of any decision we take to plant trees.

Supplementary Question

In your reply you state that "whenever trees are planted, a balanced and proper maintenance programme should be entered into." May I

point out that there are many stakeholders involved in this. Is there any way we can better strategically coordinate the looking after of these trees?

Reply

The County Council is looking to put a policy in place which dictates how we will look after the trees we plant and will share that once it is done. I know that District Councils will also have their own policies and we can look to using the Staffordshire Sustainability Board for partner authorities to work together on the harmonisation of those policies.

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

Question

On a regular basis myself as a County Councillor receives complaints from residents regarding claiming for damages to motor vehicles due to faulty Highways issues and uneven pavements / trip hazard injuries. Can I have the latest data for insurance claims made and paid out because of Highways claims and personal injury?

Reply

The existence of a highway defect does not in itself constitute a legal liability on the council. The courts have accepted that Highway Authorities cannot be on hand at all times to repair or put right each and every defect or remove every piece of debris the moment it arises on the road. Instead, highway authorities should have a reasonable regime in place to identify and action safety defects in a timescale corresponding to the level of risk they pose to highway users.

To meet this duty like most other Local Highway Authorities we inspect all roads, footways and cycleways at regular intervals. The public can also report safety defects directly to the council online or through the MyStaffs app. Identified defects are risk assessed and given an order of priority for repair.

The council is only liable where it has failed to maintain these systems and processes or where the timescale for completing the repair exceeds that assigned for the level of risk. This is why, especially during and immediately after the winter season, crews are often fully utilised attending to higher risk category 1 and 2 defects, and return at a later date to deal with lower risk category 3 defects.

Highway claims data for the last 5-years shows that during this period an average of around 1,600 third-party highway claims have been received by the council each year. The council's successful repudiation rate is around 70%, meaning that on average less than 500 claims are accepted each year with a total cost in the order of £1.25m/year.

The extra £30m being invested in road repairs over the next two years is expected to further improve this picture. This will allow more repairs to be carried out within legal timescales, helping to further reduce the risk of personal injury and property damage claims.

On top of repairing around 30,000 potholes each year this extra £30m investment will:

- enable five more major road reconstruction schemes at key locations into our towns;
- the resurfacing of nine junctions/roundabouts;
- an extra 800,000 sq.m of pothole prevention surface treatments; and
- additional work to repair and improve many old highway drainage systems.

Central Government have also recently announced further funding of over £4.8M to fix more roads and of this £2M will be used to repair local County Councillor led prioritised pothole repairs.

Fixing more roads is a top priority for the Council. We want the people of Staffordshire to see an improvement in our highways over the next few years and are most grateful for help from the public who can report specific highway defects to us online and through the MyStaffs app - helping with the planning and co-ordination of efficient and effect repairs.

Supplementary Question

Having studied the claims procedure on the County Council's website, could I ask that the background information provided in the response to my question be included in the preamble on the on-line claims form in an endeavour to reduce the number of non-qualifying claims and thus free up officer time?

Reply

That is a good suggestion and I will ask officers to look at this.

13. Petitions

Request for Parking Restrictions along Monks Walk, Gnosall

Councillor Winnington presented a petition from local residents requesting parking restrictions along Monks Walk, Gnosall.

Chairman

ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING – 18 May 2023

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP – NOMINATIONS OF GROUP LEADERS

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (13)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
12	1	-
Tina Clements	Nigel Yates	
Mike Davies		
John Francis		
Gill Heath		
Jeremy Oates		
Jeremy Pert		
Bernard Peters		
Kath Perry		
Bob Spencer		
Samantha Thompson		
Mike Wilcox		
Mike Worthington		

PROSPEROUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (10)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
9	1	-
Tina Clements	Charlotte Atkins	
Philippa Haden		
Philip Hudson		
Graham Hutton		
Peter Kruskonjic		
Samantha Thompson		
David Smith		
Ross Ward		
Bernard Williams		
Co-opted Members - Reverend Prebendary Michael Metcalf (Church of England Diocese representative); Hannah Gallimore (Parent Governor representative) and; three vacancies - Roman Catholic Diocese representative (1) and Parent Governor Representatives (2)		

SAFEGUARDING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (10)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
9	1	-
Gill Burnett-Faulkner	Gillian Pardesi	
Janet Eagland		
Anne Edgeller		
Johnny McMahon		
Kath Perry		
Paul Snape		
Bob Spencer		
Mike Wilcox		
Conor Wileman		

HEALTH AND CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (13)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
11	1	1
Philip Atkins	Charlotte Atkins	Jill Hood
Richard Cox		
Ann Edgeller		
Keith Flunder		
Phil Hewitt		
Thomas Jay		
Kath Perry (AW 07/06/23)		
Jeremy Pert		
Bernard Peters		
Janice Silvester-Hall		
Mike Sutherland (AW 07/06/23)		
Ian Wilkes		

PLANNING COMMITTEE (15)

To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
13	1	1
Jak Abrahams	Arshad Asfar	Tom Loughborough-Rudd
Richard Cox		
John Francis		
Phil Hudson		
Johnny McMahon		
Jeremy Oates		
Rob Pritchard		
David Smith		
Paul Snape		
Mike Sutherland		
Carolyn Trowbridge		
Jill Waring		
Mark Winnington		

PENSIONS COMMITTEE (9)

To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
8	1	-
Philip Atkins	Syed Hussain	
Mike Davies		
Colin Greatorex		
Derrick Huckfield		
Bob Spencer		
Mike Sutherland		
Stephen Sweeney		
Mike Wilcox		

AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE (15)

To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
14	1	-
Richard Cox	Arshad Asfar	
Keith Flunder		
Philippa Haden		
Phil Hewitt		
Derrick Huckfield		
Graham Hutton		
Bernard Peters		
James Salisbury		
Janice Silvester-Hall		
Stephen Sweeney		
Carolyn Trowbridge		
Ross Ward		
Bernard Williams		
Mike Worthington		

OTHER BODIES:

CORPORATE PARENTING MEETING (15)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
13	1	1
Gill Burnett-Faulkner	Syed Hussain	Jill Hood
Janet Eagland		
Ann Edgeller		
Alex Farrell		
Keith Flunder		
John Francis		
Phil Hewitt		
Phil Hudson		
Thomas Jay		
Peter Kruskonjic		
Mark Sutton		
Samantha Thompson		
Victoria Wilson		

CHARITIES AND TRUSTS COMMITTEE (5)

To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
5	-	-
Phil Hewitt		
Thomas Jay		
David Smith		
Paul Snape		
Mark Winnington		

PROPERTY SUB-COMMITTEE (5)

To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
5	-	-
Mark Deaville		
Ian Parry		
Jonathan Price		
Alan White		
Philip White		

COUNTY FARMS TENNANCIES PANEL (3)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
3	-	-
Gill Heath		
Carolyn Trowbridge		
Victoria Wilson		

COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY PANEL (7) (Subject to the approval of the Planning Committee)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
7	-	-
Jak Abrahams		
Phil Hudson		
Rob Pritchard		
David Smith		
Paul Snape		
Jill Waring		
Mark Winnington		

STANDARDS PANEL (5) (Subject to the approval of the Audit and Standards Committee)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
5	-	-
Philippa Haden		
Graham Hutton		
Carolyn Trowbridge		
Bernard Williams		
Mike Worthington		

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (5)		
To be nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group	To be nominated by the Leader of the Labour Group	Independent
5	-	-
Philip Atkins		
Paul Northcott		
Kath Perry		
Paul Snape		
Mike Wilcox		