

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:

- This month saw a decline of 90 claimants in Staffordshire which contrasted with an increase seen nationally. The total number of claimants in the county now stands at 14,955 or 2.8% of the working age population. 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%.
- The youth claimant count in Staffordshire saw an increase of 65 claimants to a total of 2,885 young people. The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit now stands at 4.6%. This is lower than the national rate of 5.0% and far lower than the regional rate of 6.7%. The continued increase in the youth claimant count highlights the importance of continuing to engage with our younger residents and support them to find employment or continue in some form of education or training.
- Our Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Service has been focusing on results day recently for both GCSE's and A-Level students, promoting the support the team can offer with advice and signposting. Our Employment Brokers have been supporting people across the county, whether they have received their grades in order to follow their favoured path, or maybe need some advice on where to turn next and consider other avenues such as employment, apprenticeships or alternative training.
- I am also pleased to report that two members of the Jobs and Careers Service team recently had a visit with the Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression Mims Davis to discuss how they support candidates with challenges in accessing the employment market and our support for ex-service men and women. I'm pleased to say that the Minister was very impressed in our success to date and the companies we work in partnership with to support people into employment.
- In terms of job vacancies, there was a 15% increase in across Staffordshire compared to a 13% increase nationally between July and August. Demand for labour and skills remains high, with there

currently being 1.6 jobs available for every claimant within the county, and therefore our focus continues to be to support those who find themselves unemployed to secure one of those jobs.

- Unfortunately, we have recently heard the news of the Wilko insolvency, which is due to the continued impact of the shift in shopping habits across the country. We have convened a taskforce comprised of senior representatives of the County Council, Borough and District Councils, Department for Work & Pensions and the National Careers Service to exchange information and consider our support offer, including the deployment of our Jobs & Careers Services if and when appropriate. Positively, there are currently around 1,000 retail jobs being advertised within the county, and we will work with any former Wilko staff to help them secure one of these jobs or to move into a different area of work.
- The construction of the West Midlands Interchange development is expected to begin before the end of the year. A key aspect of the project will be supporting our residents to take advantage of employment opportunities through both the construction and operational phases, and we were successful in securing a significant amount of funding from the development for employment and skills programmes. Due to the scale of the development, we have a dedicated Employment Broker for the project who has now met with the first sub-contractor to begin recruitment for the first phase of the build.
- The upgrade of the A38 Branston Interchange is a key component of our successful £20m bid from round two of the Levelling Up Fund. This will provide Burtonians with safer and easier access to and from the A38. Legal agreements with the developer of the nearby Branston Locks development and National Highways are also close to being agreed and it is expected will be signed shortly. There is a three-month lead in before construction can start, and we're therefore expecting works on improving the junction to commence in early 2024. The Levelling Up Fund is also paying for the upgrade of several major roads in Cannock and Stafford and the purchase of a new fleet of low emission buses to improve our public transport network.
- The nominations for the Enjoy Staffordshire tourism awards closed last week, with judging taking place over the next few months and the awards ceremony set for March 2024. The awards give us the chance to celebrate our best tourism and hospitality business and the valuable contribution they make to the local economy.

(Cabinet 20 September 2023)

2. Living My Best Life' - A Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent People in Staffordshire 2023-2028

The Cabinet have approved the final draft of a new 'Living my Best Life': Joint Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent people in Staffordshire 2023-2028 which has been jointly developed by the Staffordshire County Council and the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

The vision for the new strategy is: 'We want Staffordshire to become a place where people living with disabilities and neurodivergences can do what matters to them; where they are valued and treated as equals in all aspects of society; and where they can live a healthier and better quality of life for longer.'

The strategy focusses on supporting people to live their best lives, regardless of the nature of their disability or neurodivergence or whether they have care and support needs. It considers experiences and needs of individuals throughout their lives in education, work and as individuals in their homes and in local communities using transport, accessing social, leisure and cultural opportunities and accessing local shops and services and health and social care support.

An action plan is to be co-produced by the end of December 2023 and its delivery will be overseen by the new Disability Partnership Board and ultimately, the Health and Wellbeing Board.

(Cabinet 19 July 2023)

3. Supported Living Future Commissioning Arrangements Update

Supported Living care services provide individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions the support they need to be as independent as they wish. The Council currently funds Supported Living care services for 559 residents, 474 in county and 85 out of county, at a gross annual cost of £34.1 million.

After talking with individuals who benefit from Supported Living care services, care providers and other stakeholders, the Council has developed a commissioning plan to ensure that we get the best possible quality of care, the outcomes that individuals want and value for money.

The Cabinet have approved the commissioning plan and have delegated authority to the Director of Health and Care to appoint successful care providers to the Flexible Framework for Supported Living care services and to award call-off contracts under the Flexible Framework for Supported Living care services. They have also authorised the Director of Health and Care to extend the current Dynamic Purchasing System for contracting

Supported Living care services up to 1 July 2025 to cover the period of transition to the new contracts.

(Cabinet 19 July 2023)

4. Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards - Contract Award

The Council has a statutory duty to manage Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications. This is a procedure prescribed in law when it is necessary to deprive a person of their liberty in a hospital or care home if they lack capacity to consent to their treatment and care. Staffordshire has a lot of care homes, which means we receive a high number of DoLS applications and, historically, we had a large waiting list of DoLS applications.

The Government was planning to replace DoLS with new legislation called Liberty Protection Safeguards. This would have reduced demand as well as time requirements. However, Liberty Protection Safeguards have been repeatedly delayed with no implementation date in the foreseeable future and a possibility that they will be abandoned altogether.

The Cabinet have therefore given their approval to the procurement of additional capacity to support the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards process with the aim of reducing the waiting list of DoLS applications below 550, equivalent to one month's work.

(Cabinet 19 July 2023)

5. Staffordshire Bus Strategy

The aim of the Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) across England is to improve bus public transport recognising that a strong, successful, low emission bus network will help support the decarbonization of the transport sector, support the economy and minimise traffic congestion. The Staffordshire BSIP was developed in partnership with the public bus providers operating in Staffordshire, to deliver outcomes which were shaped by a public engagement exercise and comments from the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The financial ask of the BSIP to the DfT was £106m which was to be delivered over 3 years and a further £7m to cover lifetime costs, however, the Staffordshire BSIP bid was unsuccessful. Cabinet have therefore agreed that of a full review of the previously agreed BSIP be undertaken taking into account the Department for Transport (DfT) feedback to enable Staffordshire County Council a greater chance of success for future bids.

The Cabinet have also given their approval to the completion of the process for the creation of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) that is to commence on the 1 August 2023. The EP is a formal agreement between the local

authority and bus operators setting out what is expected of each party, and the standards that will be met.

(Cabinet 19 July 2023)

6. Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 1, 2023/24

The Cabinet have received an update on Quarter 1 activities for each service area: Health and Care; Families and Communities; Economy, Infrastructure and Skills; and Corporate Services. They noted the key challenges facing the Authority including:

- Continued pressures across Children's services, including the rising cost, number and complexity of Children in Care, and ongoing placement pressures.
- SEND - Increased demand for Education, Health and Care Plans.
- Safeguarding and Deprivation of Liberty - Safeguarding requests remain high, with additional capacity being explored.

The latest revenue forecast outturn showed an overspend of £9.5m (1.39%), compared to the balanced budget.

(Cabinet 19 July 2023)

7. Treasury Management Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2023

The Cabinet have received details of the Council's investment and borrowing activity during 2021/22 including both borrowing and investment decisions taken throughout the year in the light of the interest rates and economic conditions prevailing at the time.

They noted that the treasury management activities were carried out prudently during the year and the policy of funding new borrowing from internal cash balances continued to generate significant savings.

As well as being prudent, the County Council's low-risk investment strategy, which focuses on lending to low-risk institutions and the need for liquidity and diversification, has ensured the County Council has been strategically placed to deal with market challenges arising from global events such as the war in Ukraine and global inflationary pressures.

(Cabinet 19 July 2023)

8. Accelerated Progress Plan: Enhanced Assess-Plan-Do-Review Pathway, Strategy for Special Provision and the Staffordshire Children and Young People's Framework

The Cabinet have approved two major strategies designed to deliver outcomes related to the SEND Accelerated Progress Plan (Ofsted/CQC). The proposed Strategy for Special Provision sets out plans to significantly enhance the support mainstream schools can access to support their work to meet the needs of children with SEND. The model proposes an enhanced pre-statutory support pathway (before Educational, Health and Care Plan), designed to target, and focus intervention for children with SEND. This pathway builds on existing best practice and the well-established District Model. To deliver this enhanced and targeted support, the strategy proposes to develop 8 district Staffordshire Enhanced District Inclusion Teams. It is proposed that teams will comprise of school providers working with Local Authority and Health Services. Within the Strategy for Special Provision, additional work has already commenced to enhance and increase capacity in existing special schools in line with a detailed countywide gap analysis.

It is recognised some children and young people may require pre-statutory support which is beyond the scope of what the Staffordshire Enhanced District Inclusion Teams can offer, therefore the creation of a Staffordshire Children and Young People's Framework is proposed. The Framework would operate as a means of securing the provision required for children and young people to continue accessing the curriculum whilst supporting a greater equality of access, a consistent approach to monitoring outcomes and a more transparent procurement process.

(Cabinet 20 September 2023)

9. Staffordshire Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

"Adaptation" is understanding the risk and vulnerabilities associated with the changing climate and considering ways to prevent or minimise the damage it causes. As our climate changes we need to act to put measures in place to allow for quality of life to be maintained and protect the economy and environment now and in the future. Local Authorities have an important role in raising awareness and empowering local communities and businesses by sharing information on how impacts can be managed and what we can all do to help. The Cabinet have approved the Staffordshire Adaptation Strategy which will provide a suitable framework to allow individual councils to develop their own Adaptation delivery plans, encouraging consistency and partnership working across the councils and other partners in a collaborative nature. The Adaptation Plan will align with other relevant plans such as the Staffordshire County Council Local Flood Risk Management Strategy approved in March this year.

(Cabinet 20 September 2023)

10. The Recommission of the Shared Lives

The Shared Lives service offers long term placements as well as short breaks, day opportunities and home from hospital placements for individuals aged 16 and above. This includes older people, people with mental health needs including dementia, people with a physical or sensory impairment, learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and people with complex needs. Most of the individuals currently accessing the service have a learning disability and associated needs. The Council currently has a Shared Lives service contract with PSS UK LTD, which is due expire on 31 March 2024. The service currently supports 78 people at a forecast cost of £1.3 million in 2023/24. The Cabinet have approved proposals to recommission the service to provide continuity of care for individuals and ensure an ongoing good quality service that offers value for money. The Cabinet have also approved the extension of the current Shared Lives service contract for up to 12 months, in the event of an unsuccessful procurement, to enable the Council to consider alternative options.

(Cabinet 20 September 2023)

11. Staffordshire Warmer Homes – Approval of the Spend plans for the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2

The Government Green Homes Grant is aimed at tackling fuel poverty, meeting the 2050 Carbon Net Zero targets and re-energising local economies in the wake of the Covid pandemic. The Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 is the fourth phase of the Green Homes Grant. It provides people living in homes with low energy performance ratings (Energy Performance Certificates D to G) with free installation of measures to improve thermal efficiency. The measures include loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, external wall insulation and air source heat pumps, as well as solar photovoltaic panels with battery storage, solar thermal panels, and underfloor insulation, adapting homes to the impact of climate change again contributing towards lowering Staffordshire's carbon dioxide emissions. Staffordshire County Council has been awarded £10.5m from the Government Green Homes Grant Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 and the Cabinet have approved proposals for the expenditure of the Grant in line with the conditions of the Grant. These proposals will support another 530 households that are currently in fuel poverty to have warmer homes and will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by around 13,000 tonnes over the life of the installed measures.

(Cabinet 20 September 2023)

12. Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Service

Launched by the county council early in 2023, the Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Service is supporting people to find work and apprenticeships, learn new skills, and change careers. Our team of expert brokers connect jobseekers with the right employers and training opportunities across the

county, and can react quickly to situations such as the relocation of Amazon or collapse of Wilko.

Throughout the Autumn, the service is hosting jobs and careers fairs across the county, including one in Cannock today (12th October) and in Rugeley and Newcastle at the end of the month. Find out more on its [website](#), including advice on careers or training options, top tips to gain employment and information for businesses.

This excellent partnership with the Jobcentre Plus, National Careers Service, district and borough councils and the county's colleges, is providing joined up and comprehensive support not only to people looking for employment or training, but also employers searching for ideal candidates for their vacancies.

13. Fixing more roads

Throughout the summer our highways crews continued to repair, resurface and improve roads and footpaths across Staffordshire. The work included the £1.4m resurfacing and improvements to the A34 Stone Road in Stafford.

We know good roads are important for residents and businesses and that is why we are investing an additional £30m in our highways over the next two years to keep them well-maintained, safe and on the move. We are also concentrating on major gateways into our towns, to make sure we keep the busiest roads in good condition.

14. Celebrating 10 years of diverting waste from landfill

It is a decade since the county council and Veolia opened the Energy Recovery Facility at Four Ashes in South Staffordshire. In that time an incredible 2.75million tonnes of household waste have been diverted from landfill, and the waste has instead been used to help generate enough electricity to power 66,000 homes.

Reducing the amount of waste that goes into landfill makes Staffordshire more sustainable, and is a major part of our commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

15. Call to get your Covid and flu jabs this autumn

As temperatures start to drop, I urge all eligible people across the county to get their Covid and flu jabs, to protect themselves and their loved ones over the autumn and winter when viruses circulate more easily.

The emergence of a new variant is a stark reminder that Covid-19 is still circulating, and we must remain vigilant. It is vital that our most vulnerable residents receive a booster vaccine to strengthen their immunity and reduce the risk of becoming seriously ill.

Please take up the Covid booster and flu jab this autumn as soon as you are invited by the NHS. It is the best way to protect yourself and those around you.

16. Give a child a childhood

Every year, tens of thousands of children across the UK need someone to provide foster care and in Staffordshire alone, 60 more foster families need to be found this year. Now with children back at school, and older teenagers off to university or college, those families with a spare room are being urged to consider fostering

'Give a child a childhood', is the latest campaign to attract the next generation of foster families. Fostering is an incredible way of putting your time and energy into helping a young person, and making an enormous difference in their life. Most people can foster, but you do need to have a spare bedroom. You do not have to foster full-time either, as we also need foster carers for short breaks.

Anyone interested in finding out more about fostering with Staffordshire County Council can visit the [Foster for Staffordshire website](#) or call 0800 169 2061.