

Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 11 December 2024

Attendance	
Mark Deaville	Simon Tagg
Ian Parry	Alan White (Chair)
Jeremy Pert	Philip White
Jonathan Price	Victoria Wilson
Mark Sutton	

Cabinet Support Members in attendance: Paul Northcott and Robert Pritchard.

Apologies: Keith Flunder

Part One

65. Declarations of Interest in accordance with Standing Order 16

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

66. Decision notice of the meeting held on 20 November 2024

Decision – That the notes of the meeting held on 20 November 2024 be approved.

67. Leader's Update

Decision – That the oral report of the Leader of the Council, as set out below, be noted:

"Heading towards Christmas and the New Year is a natural time for reflection.

For us, it's also the time when we're setting the council's budget.

As we've been working this through, there's no denying that local government faces many challenges in the future, but I've also been reminded of just how much the county council has accomplished in 2024.

Let me give you some figures – and not just the pounds and pence.

This council provide hundreds of vital services every day.

From the day we register the birth of a Staffordshire baby – there's been 2281 new arrivals so far this year - to supporting families with arrangements for elderly nursing care, we are there.

One of our key roles is to support our economy and generate better-paid jobs.

We've been working tirelessly to support businesses to start-up and grow:

- investing millions to unlock employment sites like Chatterley Valley - one of the biggest business developments in the north of the county in decades,
- seeing local businesses thrive in our enterprise centres and
- supporting more than 300 people to bring their business ideas to life through our Get Started and Grow programme.

We know that good roads are vital to a thriving economy as well as helping people connect with family and friends, so earlier this year we invested an extra £8 million into fixing more roads.

As a result, we've filled over 24,000 potholes, completed 21 major structural schemes and surface dressed 762 roads covering more than 1.7million square metres.

Elsewhere in our communities, we've seen over a million visits to our 42 libraries in the past six months, many of which are run alongside our excellent community partners.

People have made over one and a half million visits to our 14 Household Waste Recycling Centres, recycling 36,000 tonnes of waste.

The brand-new Staffordshire History Centre opened in November, seeing over 1,200 visitors in the first three weeks and we've begun consultation on how some of the £18m we've committed to protect and enhance Staffordshire's green spaces should be spent.

This year, we've launched 11 Family Hubs, saw children take part in 50,000 activity sessions as part of our holiday activity and food clubs over the summer and have seen 9 in 10 parents get a first choice school place for their children.

At the same time, on any given day, our social care teams are protecting and supporting thousands of adults and children with the care they need...

And all this whilst reducing our carbon emissions by a remarkable 52% since declaring a climate change emergency.

This is just a snapshot of the work we do every day.

There is a huge amount to be celebrated and thankful for in our wonderful county.

Yes, we are facing some big challenges in the future, especially with the rising costs of services and increasing numbers of people needing social care support. But as a well-run council, we continue to invest in our county. Not all councils are in this position.

I'd like to take this opportunity, as this is the last Cabinet meeting of the year, to thank all of our officers, volunteers and partners for their continued dedication and hard work and wish you all a very happy Christmas."

Note: Councillor Philip White took the chair.

68. Minutes of the meeting of the Property Sub-Committee held on 27 November 2024

Decision – That the minutes of the meeting of the Property Sub-Committee held on 27 November 2024 be received.

69. Staffordshire Means Back to Business

Decision – That the 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 be noted:

"Unfortunately, this month I'm not able to update Cabinet on the latest claimant count as I normally do as the figures are not due to be released until next week. Whilst changes to the system for claiming Universal Credit have resulted in an increase in the number of claimants in Staffordshire over recent months, this increase has been below regional and national averages and I therefore very much hope to be able to update Cabinet on continued positive news in January.

One of our key economic priorities is supporting residents in being able to take advantage of high-paid job opportunities, a vital aspect of which is having a skills system that provides people with the skills and qualifications that are, and will, be needed for jobs now and in the future. We already have a strong network of colleges and universities across the county, and I'd like to offer my congratulations to the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group which has recently retained its outstanding rating from Ofsted, a rating it has now held for over 5 years. Particularly pleasing is the inspector's recognition of the groups strong contribution to meeting skills needs, a new aspect of the inspection process and which shows how our skills providers are aligning their provision to meet the needs of businesses.

Whilst we already have a network of skills providers who have helped to

deliver a substantial increase in the number of our residents with higher level skills and reduce the number with no qualifications at all, we need to continue to ensure that our skills system is fit for purpose. Our colleges and universities therefore continue to develop their facilities, and perhaps the most significant development at the moment is our Institute of Technology (IoT). This is being led by the Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group in collaboration with several other skills providers and businesses. The IoT will utilise a hub and spoke approach with the hub in Stafford and courses being delivered through education providers across the county, playing a key role in our future skills system. I was therefore pleased to see that the £22.5m hub building has recently topped out, marking the structural completion of the scheme and the building reaching its highest point.

Keele University is one of the core education providers of the IoT and plays a vital role in supporting growth in Newcastle-under-Lyme, across Staffordshire and the wider region, including through the Science and Innovation Park which is estimated to contribute £75 million to the local economy every year. The Park is currently home to more than 60 businesses which employ around 1,000 people on site, including within facilities supported and developed by the County Council. The Science Park has recently received the Building Environmental Sustainability and Innovation Award at the UK Science Park Association Awards, recognising the Park's significant role in addressing climate change and reducing environmental impact, which highlights not only how the Park supports local growth but is also playing a key role in addressing national and global challenges.

Keele University and the Science and Innovation Park are important parts of our Fifty500 programme which aims to take full advantage of the significant growth opportunities across the A50/A500 corridor, from Crewe across to the M1. I've provided updates to Cabinet previously on our efforts, working with partners across the corridor, in progressing this important piece of work, including engagement with the several major international companies on their plans for growth and the development of an investment prospectus which outlines several key projects which businesses have stated will support their development and efforts to decarbonise.

It was therefore positive to see that there was a strong focus on clusters in the recently released industrial strategy green paper, and I strongly believe that we have already shown that the Fifty500 is a nationally significant cluster and growth location which the government should be supporting us in developing further. We have made this point in our response to the green paper consultation and will continue to make the case for investment in the programme over the coming months. This is of course alongside the substantial opportunities that exist in our centres and



corridors across the county, with many of the priority sectors referenced in the green paper having a strong presence within Staffordshire.

Many of our most well-renowned businesses and industries are located within rural parts of the county. This is why we felt it was important for us to set our priorities for this important part of the Staffordshire economy through our Rural Economic Strategy which we agreed early last year. Since then we have developed an implementation plan which outlines the key projects and programmes of ourselves and our partners to deliver the strategy, with a great deal of progress already being made including:

- The recent launch of the Succeed and Grow business support programme to help rural microbusinesses grow and thrive;
- Running Funding Hero events for businesses in rural areas to help them access external funding and ensure they are investment ready;
- The development of pop hub Rural Hubs planned within Staffordshire Moorlands which will bring together business support providers in hard-to-reach areas;
- The appointment of a sustainable champion as part of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership Board to support the delivery of sustainable tourism; and
- Our Project Gigabit programme which continues to deliver fibre broadband and improve digital connectivity to rural areas across the county.

Finally, in my last update of the year I must mention Christmas and the many events and activities that are taking place across the county for people to enjoy. Events are taking place at Alton Towers, Drayton Manor Resort and the Snowdome to name a few, the National Memorial Arboretum and Lichfield Cathedral have illuminations and light shows, whilst pantos are being performed and Christmas markets taking place across Staffordshire. I'd therefore encourage people to check out the Enjoy Staffordshire to see what's on offer and fully enjoy the festivities."

70. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-2030

	<p>“Years of strong financial management mean we are still able to strike the right balance and invest in Staffordshire’s future as a place to live, work and study.</p> <p>Spending for the coming year includes maintaining highways and clearing gullies, attracting new businesses to create jobs, and investing in school repair and expansion. Other investment includes in public health, children’s services and maintaining a network of 14 household waste recycling centres.</p> <p>At a time when many local authorities are only focusing on the services they must legally provide, I am proud that we are able to do this.”</p> <p>Alan White, leader of the Council</p>
	<p>“In Staffordshire for every £10 we spend, two-thirds is spent on keeping vulnerable children and adults safe and cared for – and everything else we do is funded by what is left.</p> <p>Add the consequences of increasing numbers of children with Special Educational Needs needing support, the cost of which is far greater than the Department for Education formula funding it, and this authority faces continuing financial pressure in coming years.</p> <p>These issues are not unique to Staffordshire and we continue to work with others to lobby Government to provide a workable long-term solution nationally.”</p> <p>Ian Parry, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources</p>

Reasons for the Decision – To update Cabinet on the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2025 to 2030

Decision – (a) That the updates to the financial plans, as set out in the report, including the potential use of reserves to balance the MTFS period


and risks associated with that be noted.

(b) That the new savings as well as the commitment to continue to deliver the previously approved cost reductions, as set out in Appendices 2a – 2e to the report, be endorsed.

(c) That the Cabinet receive a further report in January to recommend a Revenue Budget, MTFs and Council Tax to full council in February.

(d) That the Corporate Review Committee be asked to scrutinise the proposed pressures and cost reduction options against the principles of a good and balanced budget.

71. Staffordshire Housing with Care Strategy 2024-2029

	<p>“Our five-year Housing with Care Strategy sets out how we can deliver, together with our District and Borough Council partners, a suitable supply of housing so that people with adult social care needs can live fulfilling, independent lives”.</p> <p>Jeremy Pert, Cabinet Member for Health and Care</p>
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Reasons for the Decision – To consider and approve the proposed Housing with Care Strategy 2024-2029.

Decision – (a) That the Housing with Care Strategy 2024-29 be approved.

(b) That the intention to include expectations for new developments to adopt “Lifetime Homes” standards to meet the changing needs of residents and contribute to climate change objectives be noted.

72. Customer Experience Strategy

	<p>“Our residents have always been at the heart of what we do, and we acknowledge that over the last few years their needs and expectations of us have evolved.</p> <p>We believe that by listening to and working with residents, we will be able to respond even more effectively.</p> <p>This strategy, built on the views and opinions of our residents, focuses on making the service we offer simpler and more efficient and will ensure that we address real concerns in a cost-effective way.”</p> <p>Ian Parry, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources</p>
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Reasons for the Decision – To consider approval of the Customer Experience Strategy so that it can be implemented.

Decision – (a) That the learnings from our engagement and how this has shaped the development of the strategy, be noted.

(b) That the Strategy and its implementation be approved, and delegate authority be given to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services to approve the Customer Experience Delivery Plan for implementation and delivery.

(c) That the schedule and approach for performance monitoring and launch of the Strategy, including with a further customer and employee survey each year, with further detail to be brought back to Scrutiny and Cabinet each year, be approved.

73. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 15 January to 21 May 2025 which detailed the following issues, was approved:

Subject Matter	Contact
Recommissioning of Supported Living Care Services	Name: Andrew Jepps Tel: (01785) 278557
Modern Methods of Construction Framework Agreement	Name: Ian Turner Tel: (01785) 277228

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Economic Strategy	Name: Anthony Hodge Tel: (01785) 277204
Commissioning of Care Home Placements	Name: Andrew Jepps Tel: (01785) 278557
Sale of Surplus Land at Hoon Avenue, Newcastle-under-Lyme	Name: Ian Turner Tel: (01785) 277228
Supporting Families post March 2025	Name: Natash Moody Tel: 07976 191079
Unregulated Placement Update	Name: Nisha Gupta Tel: 07890 402088
Entrust Service Delivery Agreement Review	Name: Ian Turner Tel: (01785) 277228
Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025 - 2030	Name: Rachel Spain Tel: (01785) 854455
Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 3, 2024/25	Name: Rachel Spain/ Wendy Tompson Tel: (01785) 854454/ (01785) 854267
Capital Programme for Schools 2025/26	Name: Ian Turner Tel: (01785) 277228
Climate Change Action Plan - Revision	Name: David Atkinson Tel: (01785) 277910
Highways and Transport Capital Programme 2025/26	Name: James Bailey Tel: (01785) 276591
Contract award of Local Authority social care case management system	Name: Jo Cowcher/ Nisha Gupta Tel: 07772 011078 / 07890 402088
Integrated Performance Report - Quarter 4, 2024/25	Name: Rachel Spain/ Wendy Tompson Tel: (01785) 854454/ (01785) 854267
Data and Insight Strategy	Name: Lynsey Bissell Tel: 07855 026263

Leader of the Council