

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 17 March 2016

Present:

Attendance		
Ben Adams	John Francis	Sheree Peuple
George Adamson	Bob Fraser	Kath Perry
Margaret Astle	Michael Greatorex	Trish Rowlands
Charlotte Atkins	Sandra Hambleton	Jeff Sheriff
Philip Atkins	Gill Heath	David Smith
Ann Beech	Ian Hollinshead	Alison Spicer
Len Bloomer	Derrick Huckfield	Mark Sutton
Frank Chapman	Kevin Jackson	Stephen Sweeney
Ron Clarke	Keith James	Simon Tagg
Maureen Compton	Brian Jenkins	John Taylor
Chris Cooke	Philip Jones	Martyn Tittley
Tim Corbett	Mike Lawrence	Diane Todd
Mike Davies	Ian Lawson	Alan White
Peter Davies	David Loades	Conor Wileman
Derek Davis, OBE	Robert Marshall	David Williams
William Day	Geoff Martin	Susan Woodward
Carol Dean	Shelagh McKiernan	Caroline Wood
Mark Deaville	Christine Mitchell	Mike Worthington
Janet Eagland	Mark Olszewski	
Terry Finn	Ian Parry	

Apologies for absence: Alan Dudson, Brian Edwards and Mark Winnington

PART ONE

59. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 11 February 2016

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 11 February 2016 be confirmed.

60. Chairman's Correspondence

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

61. 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.

Ivanovo

(Paragraph 1 of the Statement)

Mr Atkins welcomed a delegation from Ivanovo to the meeting. The delegation was led by the Head of the City - Aleksei Khokhlov and also included Anton Grachev, Iuliia Pozhidaeva and Darya Rodomanova.

Devolution

(Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Members held a wide ranging discussion on devolution and what this would mean in practice to local communities within Staffordshire, the potential benefits it could bring and how decisions affecting local communities were better made at a local level rather than in Whitehall. Mr Smith and Mr Adamson expressed the view that devolution should start at the grass roots level with the development of neighbourhood plans. In responding to the points raised by Members, Mr Parry stated that it was important to recognise the opportunities devolution could bring whilst having a clear vision about what needed to be achieved. He also referred to the £7.5 bn public spend in the County and how the Council, with its partners in the public sector, needed to ensure that this money was spent wisely and effectively.

Mrs Wood enquired about the potential impact on Entrust of the Chancellor's announcement that all schools must convert to academy status by 2020. In response, Mr Parry explained that all schools, including academies could choose to purchase support services from Entrust or other provider and that this would not change under the Chancellor's proposals.

Mrs Wood and Mr Huckfield referred to Chancellor's announcement in relation to Business Rates (including the proposal to increase the threshold for the standard business rates multiplier to a rateable value of £51,000, taking 250,000 smaller properties out of the higher rate), and the potential detrimental impact this might have on Council's finances.

Mr Taylor sought a commitment from the Leader of the Council that he would facilitate a full debate on devolution at a future meeting of the Council. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that Members of the Council had been given briefings on devolution. He also outlined how the County Council was bringing benefits to the County and its residents through working at a strategic level with a range of organisations and initiatives including Midlands Connects, the Midlands Engine and West Midlands Rail. He added that there was general agreement amongst the Councils in Staffordshire that they did not wish to have an elected mayor (which was one of the prerequisites of Councils being granted devolved powers).

Adult Social Care

(Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

In response to questions from Members in relation to the integration of health and care services and the need for "measurable outcomes", Mr White explained that the Council was working with its partners in the health sector to "break down the silos" in order to bring about improvements to the integration of services. This included work with the

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership Trust to hold them to account for the services they were responsible for providing.

In response to a question from Mrs Wood in relation to the Health Visitor service, Mr White informed the Council that tenders were to be invited for the future provision of the service. He also added that the Council was looking at transforming the provision of learning disability services and that he would be seeking the views of Scrutiny as part of the development of the proposals.

Mr Marshall spoke about the need for the Council to ensure that it secures its fair share of funding under the Better Care Fund. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that the Council was committed to working with its partners in the Health sector to deliver affordable and sustainable integrated care for the benefit of the County's residents. He also added that, to date, integration had realised savings of around £24m which had been reinvested in social care.

Review of Post-16 Education and Training Institutions in Staffordshire (Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

In response to questions from members in relation to the anticipated outcomes arising from the current review of Post-16 Education and Training institutions, Mr Adams indicated that the second of the six proposed meetings had been held and some options were starting to be developed which could involve the possible rationalisation or merger of providers. He added that the Local Enterprise Partnership had clearly articulated the skills gap within the County and that the review was not just about provision in colleges but also in 6th forms and through other providers. Mr Atkins also added that there was a wide variation in the post-16 offer across the County and that the review provided an opportunity for the various stakeholders to get together to discuss future provision.

In response to a question from Mr Clarke and Mrs McKiernan in relation to the delays in the opening to students of the Burton and South Derbyshire University Technical College, Mr Adams explained that the County Council was working hard to address the issues and that it was envisaged that the College would start to take pupils in September 2016.

Members also referred to the importance of schools having access to, and being able to afford, good careers advice for their pupils. In response, Mr Adams indicated that schools were responsible for commissioning their own information, advice and guidance for pupils.

Staffordshire Flag (Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

In response to questions from Mr Jenkins and Mrs Woodward in relation to the decision to withdraw the County Council's application for the registration of its banner as the County Flag for Staffordshire, Mr Atkins indicated that the Council had lost confidence in the neutrality of the Flag Institute and its registration process and it was for this reason that the decision was taken to withdraw the application for registration. He added that as the Institute's recognition had no official or legal status, the Council would continue to fly its flag proudly as it had done for several years.

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

62. Annual Report on the Staffordshire Local Community Fund 2015

Members welcomed the report and gave examples of how the fund had been used to support their local communities and the positive impact it had had.

Several Members also expressed their disappointment over the recent decision (as part of the Council's MTFS proposals) to reduce the funding available to each Member under the scheme from £10,000 per annum to £7,500 per annum and asked that consideration be given to reversing this decision. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that when the scheme first commenced, each member was allocated £6,000 per annum. He added that he was sure that Member's would be able to continue to support the good work within their communities with the £7,500 allocation available for 2016/17.

RESOLVED – That the annual report on the Staffordshire Local Community Fund 2015 be received.

63. Outcomes of Overview and Scrutiny Work October - December 2015

The Council considered a report which provided an overview of scrutiny work that was undertaken between October and December 2015, highlighting how scrutiny had added value to the democratic process. In introducing the report, Mr Jones suggested that on the completion of a piece of scrutiny, the relevant select committee chairman should be afforded the opportunity to of presenting their report to the Cabinet.

Members spoke about the valuable role played by scrutiny and cited some examples of the work undertaken by the select committees. Mrs Woodward also referred to how good scrutiny could ultimately bring about improvements and make a positive impact on the lives of the County's residents.

Ms Atkins and Ms People expressed some concerns in relation to the effectiveness of the Accountability Sessions that were held with the NHS Trusts and added that these concerns needed to be addressed quickly. In response, Mr Jones indicated that, following a discussion with the Chairman of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee, it had been agreed that, once per year, the two Acute Health Trusts in Staffordshire would each be the subject of in-depth scrutiny.

Members also referred to the role and value of "pre-decision scrutiny" and, in response, Mr White indicated that he frequently sought the views of scrutiny on the development of policies as this often led to better insight; however there would be occasions when decisions needed to be taken quickly and it was not possible to afford time to undertake in-depth scrutiny of the issues.

RESOLVED – That the report be received.

64. Recommendations to Council

(i) Treasury Management, Annual Investment and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategies 2016/17

Members were informed that the management of the County Council's cash flows and borrowing had a significant impact on the budget. The Cabinet, at their meeting on 20 January 2016, approved the proposed strategies for the 2016/17 financial year. Adoption of the Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) and the adoption of the Minimum Revenue Provision policy were however, matters that were reserved for the Full Council to determine.

RESOLVED – That, in accordance with the regulations:

- (a) The Annual Investment Strategy (AIS) 2016/17 be adopted.
- (b) The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy 2016/17 be adopted.

(ii) Members' Allowances Scheme - Independent Remuneration Panel Report

Members were informed that the County Council was required to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to provide advice and recommendations to the Council on its Members' Allowances Scheme. Any decisions on the nature and level of allowances were a matter for the Full Council, but the Council must have regard to any recommendations submitted by the Independent Remuneration Panel before establishing or amending the Members' Allowances Scheme. The Independent Remuneration Panel's report of March 2016, including recommendations on the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2016/17, had been circulated to all Members and copies had been placed in the Members' library.

The Council was also informed that the Medium Term Financial Strategy proposals for 2016/17, which were approved by the County Council at its meeting on 11 February 2016, included the discontinuation of the provision for Members to be reimbursed the cost of their telephone/broadband line rental. In view of this, it was necessary to amend the Council's Constitution by removing paragraph 12 of Appendix 3 to section 3 [Members' Allowance Scheme - Reimbursement of Telephone and Broadband line rental].

Mr Marshall indicated that he had decided to donate 1% of his allowance to his local community and suggested that the Council may wish to support a recommendation to reduce Members' allowances by 1% and that the monies raised by doing this be utilised to support local communities. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that, on a number of occasions in the past, the Independent Remuneration Panel had recommended increase in Members' Allowances but that the Council had resolved not to accept those increases. He also referred to the savings the Council would achieve through the decision that Members ceased to be reimbursed the cost of their telephone/broadband line rental.

RESOLVED – (a) That the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel be approved.

(b) That the period of office for Ray Betteridge, Jane Landick and Michelle Martin, members of the Independent Remuneration Panel, be extended for a further period of 12 months to 31 March 2017.

(c) That the Council's Constitution be amended by the deletion of paragraph 12 of Appendix 3 to section 3 [Members' Allowance Scheme - Reimbursement of Telephone and Broadband line rental].

65. Report of the Vice-Chairman of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Members extended their congratulations to Becci Bryant on her recent appointment as the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service's Chief Fire Officer. They also expressed their thanks to Mr Bloomer for the valuable contribution he had made to the Fire and Rescue Authority during the time he had served as its Chairman.

Mr Williams referred to Becci Bryant's appointment as Chief Fire Officer and expressed his disappointment that, during this time of uncertainty in relation to the further integration of the Fire and Rescue Service with other "Blue Light" Services under the auspices of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the opportunity had not been taken to make the appointment under a fixed term contract so as to limit the potential for future redundancy costs should there be the need to restructure the Service.

RESOLVED – That the Periodic Report of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority be received.

66. Questions

Mr Finn asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

Can you please enlighten me with a full update regarding the future proposed plans for Lichfield Library?

Reply

Our proposed plans will ensure that the County Council will provide a first-class accessible library for now and future generations in Lichfield. We are ensuring that we provide a space which fits people's changing needs and habits whilst representing the very best value for money for the taxpayer.

No final decision has yet been made; the proposed move to St. Mary's in the Square would mean a ground floor and flexible library, which is located in the centre of the city, providing plenty of space for books, IT and meeting space alongside a range of services and activities which our libraries currently provide.

If I do approve the proposal, and I assure Members that I will thoroughly consider the options paper, the business case and the comments of the Select Committee which met on 4 March 2016, the 30-year lease would be safeguarding the future of the Friary and St. Mary's Centre injecting new purpose into the two landmark buildings.

I will ensure that all local elected Members are kept informed.

Supplementary Question

Can you give me an assurance that a move from the Library's current site at the Friary to St. Mary's will not have a detrimental impact on the City?

Reply

The Friary is one of many beautiful buildings in Lichfield and, if developed after our use in the same way as the other part of the building has already been developed, it is going to continue to look wonderful and be an integral part of Lichfield City for decades to come. More importantly, the library's move to St. Mary's would provide a better library in a better place. The Tourist Information Centre will also be located in that building.

67. Petitions

Speed Limit along Manor Road, Baldwins Gate

Mr Loades presented a petition from local residents requesting the implementation of effective speed control measures along Manor Road, Baldwins Gate.

Chairman