

Minutes of the County Council Meeting held on 11 February 2016

Present:

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

Apologies for absence: Geoff Martin and Jeff Sheriff.

PART ONE

49. Confirmation of the minutes of the Council meeting held on 10 December 2015

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 10 December 2015 be confirmed.

50. Chairman's Correspondence

Queen's New Year's Honours List

The Chairman informed the Council that County Councillor Brian Edwards, who represented the Kinver County Electoral Division, had been awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours List 2016 for his services to Local Government. The Council extended their congratulations to Mr Edwards on his award.

County Councillor Geoff Morrison

The Council were informed of the death, on 9 February 2016, of County Councillor Geoff Morrison who had represented the Uttoxeter Town (East Staffordshire) County Electoral Division on the County Council since 2005.

Mr Morrison had served on a number of the County Council's Committees including the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee, Corporate Review Committee, Safeguarding and Public Protection Select Committee, Health Scrutiny Committee, Social Care Scrutiny Committee, Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny and Performance Panel, Regulatory Committee, Corporate Parenting Panel, Safety of Sports Ground Panel and the Planning Committee. He had also represented the County Council on the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Fire and Rescue Authority.

Honorary Alderman Peter John White

The Chairman informed Members of the death, on 8 January 2016, of Honorary Alderman Peter John White. Mr White represented the former Castle Liberty (Tamworth) County Electoral Division on the County Council from 1975 to 1977 and also the former Stonydelph (Tamworth) County Electoral Division between 1997 and 2009.

Mr White had served as a Member of the Council's Cabinet between 2001 and 2009 and held a range of portfolios including Environment and Corporate Performance, Social Care and Health, and Support Member for Waste. He was appointed as an Honorary Alderman for his services to the County Council in December 2009.

Members paid tribute to Mr Morrison and Mr White and then stood in silence in their memory.

51. Our vision for Staffordshire - Strategic Plan 2014-2018 and the Business Plan 2016-17

The Leader presented to the Council the Strategic Plan 2014-2018 and the Business Plan 2016-17.

Members noted that the Strategic Plan was a high level plan, setting out the county council's vision, priority outcomes and the principles of how everyone connected with the county council would work. The Strategic Plan outlined the Council's ambitions for what Staffordshire would look like by 2033, and covered a period of four years. The Strategic Plan sat alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy which covered a time period of five years in accordance with best practice.

The Strategic Plan provided focus for the organisation and ensured that the Council's resources were being directed towards the delivery of its vision for a "Connected Staffordshire where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy", and also the three priority outcomes that had been agreed by Cabinet in August 2013, i.e. the people of Staffordshire will be able to access more good jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth; be healthier and more independent; and feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community.

The Leader of the Council indicated that the three priority outcomes must remain the driving force of the Council's work; however in refreshing the business plan for 2016-17 there would be particular focus on:

- Working hard to ensure that the economy continues to grow and that everyone has a good job with good prospects.
- Helping people to help themselves to lead happy and independent lives with less need for services and support.
- Continuing to support those least able to help themselves through creating new models of care in line with our resources.

Members noted that the vision, priority outcomes and principles set out in the Strategic Plan would be delivered through the county council's business plan which contained more detailed measures, targets and activities. Performance against the Strategic Plan and Business Plan would be reported to Cabinet every quarter and any issue which arose would be monitored and addressed by relevant Cabinet Member and Senior Leadership Team leads. Progress made against the priorities identified in the Strategic Plan would also be scrutinised by the County Council's Select Committees.

Mr Parry indicated that the last few years had been a period of significant change and transformation and that the Business Plan was focused on ensuring that the County Council was fit for purpose and that the services it provided were efficient and affordable. He also cited examples of where the Council had invested in improving infrastructure in order to attract businesses to the county such as the roll-out of Superfast Broadband and the creation of business/employment parks.

Mr Adamson expressed concern at the impact of the Council's decisions to reduce its funding of some voluntary organisations/community groups and indicated that such decisions often adversely affected the most vulnerable people in the County. In response, Mr White indicated that the Council cared about and supported vulnerable people in the County but that the proposals in the Strategic Plan and accompanying Business Plans were aimed at helping people to live independent lives where they were able to do so. He also indicated that the Council's Senior Management Team had recently been restructured so as to be better able to engage with Staffordshire communities.

RESOLVED – (a) That the County Council continues to work towards the vision contained within the Strategic Plan and that the refreshed Business Plan 2016–17 be adopted.

(b) That the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the County Council, be authorised to make any minor amendments to the Business Plan 2016–17 as required to deliver the Strategic Plan.

52. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/21 and 2016/17 Budget and Council Tax

The Council received a joint report by the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategy, Finance and Corporate Issues on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2016/21 and 2016/17 Budget and Council Tax proposals.

Mr Parry expressed his thanks to the Director of Finance and Resources and to those members of staff who had assisted in the development of the MTFS and also to the Chairman and Members of the Corporate Review Committee's Medium Term Financial Strategy Working Group for the robust manner in which they had challenged and questioned Cabinet Members during their scrutiny of the MTFS/budget proposals.

Members noted that the MTFS had been prepared in conjunction with the Strategic Plan and contained the framework for the preparation of detailed revenue and capital budgets, decisions on council tax and savings and investment plans.

Mr Parry explained that the MTFS had been prepared against a background of reductions in local government finance and an increase in demand for services to support vulnerable people. It was therefore imperative that the County Council was innovative in the way in which it provided services and that resources were targeted where they were most needed. It was also recognised that, in many cases, the voluntary sector or other partnership bodies were better placed to provide some services which, historically, had been provided by the County Council. Mr Parry also added that in view of the reductions in local government finance and the increase in demand for services, it was proposed that council tax would increase by 3.95% in 2016/17 which equated to an increase of around 10p per day at a Band D rate. He also added that, with the removal of the Rate Support Grant and changes to Business Rates, the County Council would become financially independent from Central Government.

Members also noted that the proposed budget would result in achieving a balanced budget for 2016/17 in difficult financial circumstances. The future years were not balanced, even with an additional Adult Social Care precept assumed in all years and there was still work to do in order to balance the draft budget in 2017/18. Mrs Woodward and Mr Adamson suggested that the County Council should lobby Central Government with a view to securing additional funding and added that a number of Councils, particularly in the South East of England, had already done so successfully.

Mr Parry indicated that, over recent years, the Council had been reshaped in order to manage demand on services, reduce costs by £156m over five years, and to introduce creative, more affordable ways of making a positive difference to the lives of Staffordshire people – all with one of the lowest levels of council tax in the country. He added that it was essential for the Council to work closer and smarter with its public sector partners who together spent over £7billion a year of public money in Staffordshire.

Several Members spoke about their disappointment at the need to raise Council Tax by 3.95%; expressed the view that taxation should be income based rather than property based; and that Central Government should be responsible for funding social care in the same way as it funded the National Health Service. Members also raised concern about the impact of recent decisions by the Council particularly in relation to the provision of Youth Services and Children's Centres. In response, Mr White indicated that it was with "a heavy heart" that the Cabinet decided to recommend to the Council an increase in the level of Council Tax but the increase was necessary to help fund the provision of services particularly to the most vulnerable members of our society.

Mrs Atkins referred to the risks which needed to be carefully monitored and managed, in particular the management of the Council's contract with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership Trust. In response, Mr White indicated that the County Council was working closely with the partnership to ensure a consistent level of service across the County.

Mr Winnington and Mr Atkins welcomed the devolution of powers to local councils and indicated that decisions about local services were best taken at a local level rather than in Whitehall.

Mr Parry concluded the debate by indicating that this had been the most difficult MTFs and budget to compile for many years.

In accordance with statutory requirements, the Chairman called for a named vote to be taken in relation to the approval of the recommendations contained in the report, the result of which was as follows:

Those Members voting in support of the recommendations:

Ben Adams	Bob Fraser	David Smith
Philip Atkins	Michael Greateorex	Mark Sutton
Len Bloomer	Gill Heath	Stephen Sweeney
Frank Chapman	Keith James	Simon Tagg
Tim Corbett	Philip Jones	Martyn Tittley
Mike Davies	Mike Lawrence	Alan White
Mark Deaville	Ian Lawson	Conor Wileman
Janet England	David Loades	David Williams
Brian Edwards	Robert Marshall	Mark Winnington
Terry Finn	Ian Parry	Mike Worthington
John Francis	Kath Perry	

Those Members voting against the recommendations:

George Adamson	Carol Dean	Mark Olszewski
Margaret Astle	Alan Dudson	Sheree Peaple
Charlotte Atkins	Sandra Hambleton	Trish Rowlands
Ann Beech	Derrick Huckfield	Alison Spicer
Ron Clarke	Kevin Jackson	John Taylor
Maureen	Brian Jenkins	Diane Todd
Compton	Shelagh McKiernan	Caroline Wood
Peter Davis	Christine Mitchell	Susan Woodward
Derek Davis		

Those Members abstaining from voting:

Chris Cooke	William Day	Ian Hollinshead
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The Chairman declared the recommendations carried.

RESOLVED – (a) That the following be approved:

- a net revenue budget of £470.406m for 2016/17 as set out in Appendix 9 to the report;
- planning forecasts for 2017/18 to 2021/21 as set out in Appendix 9 to the report;
- a contingency provision of £2m for 2016/17;
- a net contribution from general reserves of £4.571m for 2016/17;
- a budget requirement of £465.835m for 2016/17;
- a council tax requirement of £293.874m for 2016/17;
- a council tax at Band D of £1,088.65 for 2016/17 which is an increase of 3.95% when compared with 2015/16. This results in council tax for each category of dwelling as set out in the table below:

Category of dwelling	Council Tax rate £
Band A	725.77
Band B	846.73
Band C	967.69
Band D	1,088.65
Band E	1,330.57
Band F	1,572.49
Band G	1,814.42
Band H	2,177.30

- that the Director of Finance and Resources be authorised to sign precept notices on the billing authorities respectively liable for the total precept payable and that each notice state the total precept payable and the council tax in relation to each category of dwelling as calculated in accordance with statutory requirements;
- the Capital Programme set out in Appendix 12 to the report;
- the Prudential Indicators set out in Appendix 14 to the report;
- the Authorised Limit for external debt determined for 2015/16 as detailed in Appendix 14 referred to above will be the statutory limit determined under Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003
- the Financial Health Indicators set out in Appendix 15 to the report.
- the Strategic Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy continue to be developed on the basis of a 3.95% increase in council tax in 2017/18 and future years and that services continue to develop their medium term plans on the basis of the planning forecasts set out in Appendix 9 to the report.

(b) That the Director of Finance and Resources' comments in respect of the adequacy of reserves and the robustness of the budget be noted.

(c) That the Director of Finance and Resources be authorised to adjust the contingency provision to reflect any grant changes announced in the final 2016/17 Local Government Finance Settlement.

(d) That the Director of Finance and Resources be authorised to adjust the business rates income to reflect any changes as a result of the risk surrounding appeals by NHS Trusts.

53. Statement of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council presented a Statement outlining his recent work and an overview of decisions taken by the Cabinet since the previous meeting of the Council.

A50 Growth Corridor – Progress Report (Paragraph 2 of the Statement)

Mr Greateorex indicated that he welcomed the A50 growth corridor project and the associated new housing it would bring. He also spoke about the urgent need for local councils to change their attitudes towards the development of new housing sites and, instead, to work to stimulate the growth of new and replacement housing stock. Mrs Woodward referred to the Housing and Planning Bill which was currently making its way through Parliament and indicated that the County Council should take the opportunity to forward its views on the Bill to Central Government. Mr Atkins added that he was pleased that Members were supportive of the A50 Growth Corridor proposals and the associated new housing.

In response to a question from Mr Huckfield in relation to the percentage of Business Rates currently retained by the County Council, Mr Atkins indicated that the current level was 9%.

The Future Business Model for the Shugborough Estate (Paragraph 3 of the Statement)

Several Members expressed their concern that there had been a lack of transparency around the Cabinet's decision to surrender the Council's lease of the Shugborough Estate to the National Trust. It was also suggested that the issue could have been referred to scrutiny for their views before the decision was taken. In response, Mr Parry indicated that the National Trust had requested that the negotiations for the surrender of the lease should be kept confidential until an agreement had been reached. Although the negotiations were held in private, as soon as the decision had been formally taken by the two bodies, the report to Cabinet, setting out the background and the reasons for the decision, was put in the public domain. He also added that the Shugborough Estate had been suffering from falling visitor numbers for several years; the County Council did not have the funds to invest in the Estate to try to attract more visitors; and that the Estate had been running at a loss for many years. Mr Adams added that he welcomed the agreement with the National Trust on the surrender of the lease as he was of the view that the Trust had the necessary skills to manage the Estate and also the funds to invest in its future development as a major tourist attraction in Staffordshire.

In response to a question in relation to how the costs associated with the surrender of the lease would be met, Mr Parry indicated that the cost of borrowing the funds to cover the cost of surrendering the lease were equal to the Estate's annual running costs and that the County Council would make considerable savings by no longer having a liability for the future maintenance of the Estate over the un-expired period of the lease.

Sportshire: Progress and future aspirations

(Paragraph 4 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mrs Mitchell in relation to the cost to the Council in hosting major sporting events, Mr Winnington indicated that it was anticipated that the events would be funded via sponsorship.

Mrs Woodward indicated that if the Council wished to achieve its aspirations of improving the take-up of sporting activities, particularly at grass-roots level, it needed to work closely with the leisure leads in the district and borough councils. In response, Mr Winnington indicated that discussions were ongoing with district and borough councils to promote sporting activities and improve sports facilities.

In response to a question from Mrs Astle in relation to funding for the improvement of children's play areas, Mr Winnington suggested that she contacted the relevant District Commissioning lead officer.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting until 2:10 pm

Present at 2:10 pm:

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

Support Services – Service and System Replacement

(Paragraph 5 of the Statement)

In response to a question from Mr Taylor concerning the cost of running the Council's HR and Payroll services in house compared with out-sourcing, Mr Parry indicated that the proposal to go out to tender in the open market would enable such comparisons to be made.

In response to a question from Mr Hollinshead in relation to the number of jobs which would be lost if the HR and Payroll services were out-sourced, Mr Atkins indicated that he did not have the information to hand so would reply in writing (with a copy to all Members of the Council) following the meeting.

Road and Rail

(Paragraph 9 of the Statement)

Mr Adamson referred to the under-usage of M6 Toll and expressed the opinion that, in order to alleviate congestion on the M6 through Staffordshire and around Birmingham, the Toll road should be brought in public ownership and made free to use.

Mrs Hambleton and Mr Huckfield referred to the proposals to reduce the monies allocated to Members under the Division Highways Programme and the Staffordshire Local Community Fund from £10,000 per annum to £7,500 per annum and expressed concern at the impact this would have on Members' ability to support small highways and community projects in the areas they represented. In response, Mr Atkins indicated that the funding available to Members through the above-mentioned two schemes could often be used to lever funding from other sources.

In response to a question from Mrs Astle in relation to the number of properties in Staffordshire that would be affected by HS2, Mr Winnington indicated that the route of phase 2 of HS2 was still to be confirmed so, at this stage, it was not possible to determine the exact number of properties in the County which would be blighted by the construction of HS2.

Staffordshire Day

(Paragraph 10 of the Statement)

In response to a question by Mr Jenkins as to whether Staffordshire Day would be an annual celebration, Mr Winnington indicated that the date (1 May) was selected through a public vote and was the date that the Wedgwood Pottery Company was established. Mr Atkins added that it would be an annual event and would be an opportunity to showcase the County.

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

54. Recommendations to Council

Pay Policy Statement 2016/17 – Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011

The Council were informed that it was a legal requirement of the Localism Act 2011 for the County Council to have a Pay Policy statement which must be published annually before 31 March.

RESOLVED – That the Pay Policy Statement for 2016/17 (as appended to the report) be approved.

55. Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police and Crime Panel

In moving consideration of the report, Mr Chapman referred to the recent inspection of the Staffordshire Police Force by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) which found that the Force was "inadequate" at protecting from harm those who are vulnerable and supporting victims. He added that the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner had attended the meeting of the Police and Crime Panel on 1 February 2016 and had discussed the measures which were being put in place to address the concerns raised during the recent HMIC inspection. Mr Adams explained that the protection of vulnerable people was not solely the responsibility of Police Forces and Mr Lawrence added that the County Council had offered its support to the Chief Constable and were working closely with Staffordshire Police to address HMIC's concerns.

Mr Chapman also indicated that the Police and Crime Commissioner had resolved to not increase the Council Tax precept for 2016/17.

Members discussed a range of issues including the need to strengthen the number of "front-line" officers and why the annual running costs of the Staffordshire Police and Crime Commissioner's office were similar to those of the West Midland PCC which was responsible for a much larger Police Force.

RESOLVED – That the Report of the Chairman of the Staffordshire Police and Crime Panel be received.

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

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

57. Questions

Mrs Woodward asked the following question of the Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

I'm sure that the Cabinet Member will agree with me that child-minders and childcare providers give an invaluable service to families in Staffordshire. I'm sure he will agree too that update briefings for them are important in order to keep them abreast of new initiatives and guidelines and to help them provide the best quality childcare. Is he aware, however, it would appear that Entrust are now to charge £50 per person per session for attending update briefing meetings which were previously offered free of charge and of the potential adverse impact on attendance?

Reply

Childminders across Staffordshire play a key role in supporting families and we are delighted that more than 80 per cent of our childminders are now rated as either good or outstanding by Ofsted.

Currently the County Council is in the process of agreeing a new service delivery agreement, but understands that there needs to be a balance between costs to Entrust and costs to childminders for information, guidance and learning.

As self-employed carers, we would also expect childminders to also be given information on the potential to offset some payments as part of their business costs.

Supplementary Question

What are you actually doing in a proactive way to influence this new service delivery agreement and to ensure, rather than to expect, that childminders are given the potential to offset some payments against business costs?

Reply

What I have to decide is should the services that we or Entrust are delivering across Staffordshire be delivered free of charge or, if the person or organisation receiving that service is making a financial benefit, should they be expected to meet part of the costs of delivering that service - and that is where we are today. No decision has yet been made – Entrust may be looking at this and talking to people about this but no decision has yet been made.

Mrs Astle asked the following question of the Leader of the Council whose reply is set out below the question:-

Question

At the last full council meeting I raised the following with Mr Atkins:

Is Mr Atkins aware that I require a meeting between myself and Mr Atkins as I disagree with the statistics that unemployment figures are reducing, the area that I represent this is untrue.

The Stoke/Staffordshire LEP was awarded £11m to tackle social exclusion and poverty in disadvantage area's in Stoke/Staffordshire, BBO funding, Kidsgrove, Ravenscliffe and Newchapel has been omitted.

Parts of Kidsgrove town centre falls within the Ravenscliffe ward and the town centre is suffering from boarded-up premises and lack of investment.

Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme will be implemented in the Ravenscliffe and Kidsgrove as:

Crime and anti-social behaviour is increasing above the national average

Unemployment figures are above the national average

Educational attainments are below the national average

There is an higher than average transition of residents within the community

I respectfully request a meeting with Mr Atkins?

Reply

Yes, I would be happy to meet with you to discuss the matters you have raised.

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

Question

What rights does a child on long term sickness absence from school have to home tuition and educational support and who is responsible for enforcing those rights?

Reply

Under s19 of the Education Act 1996, legal responsibility for ensuring that children who are unable to attend school for medical reasons or otherwise continue to receive a full-time education rests with the County Council once they have been absent from school for 15 school days, whether or not the child in question continues to be on the roll of a school. How this is undertaken, whether by home tuition or otherwise, will depend on the circumstances of the child in question. The County Council has delegated practical responsibility for undertaking this duty to district inclusion partnerships and pupil referral units.

Supplementary Question

In the case of a dispute over the quality and suitability of educational support between the child's parents and the school, to whom can the parents turn, who decides whether the child's future is being properly safeguarded – where does the buck actually stop?

Reply

The buck stops with the County Council. You are very welcome to contact me or the Council's Director of Children's Services if you have an individual case.

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

Question

In which documents are the rights of children to home tuition / educational support and the enforcement procedure laid down and does this vary according to the designation of the school?

Reply

An amended policy concerning how this is carried out is currently being developed. The duty remains on the local authority no matter what the designation of the school / academy which the pupil is on the roll of.

Supplementary Question

An Educational Welfare Officer has told the family I am attempting to represent that the centralised provision of funds for home tuition has been dispersed to schools. If this is the case, what oversight is there of how these funds are used to fund appropriate educational provision for their sick children?

Reply

I am not familiar with the actual case so I would be very happy to have a look at this with you. You have seen the amended policy I understand; I feel that it's going in the right direction. Prior to that, it was national guidance that we were working to and there wasn't actually a policy document for the County Council. One of the things you might like to help me with is to identify where the difference is and what we are offering differently in Staffordshire so that we can assure ourselves that we are on the right track. I think that this is important to get right and I would be happy to work with you.

58. Petitions

Parking along Fairway, Stafford

Mrs Rowlands presented a petition from local residents concerning the parking of vehicles along Fairway and adjacent roads in Stafford.

Chairman