

Statement of the Leader of the Council

1. Enabling Future Economic Growth in Staffordshire - Update

The Cabinet have received an update on the following long term strategic economic planning activities which the County Council is engaging with at a local, regional and national level to ensure future prosperity for the Staffordshire economy:

- Midlands Engine (During 2015, the 11 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) operating across the Midlands, with the support of government, and along with Local Authorities, Universities and business, came together to develop the Midlands Engine. This complements the 'Northern Powerhouse', concept, first introduced by George Osborne in June 2014, in relation to both improving connectivity and, therefore, productivity, but also creating an identifiable "brand" to attract international investment).
- Midlands Connect (The transport partnership for the Midlands Engine, formed in 2014 and brings together 28 upper tier local authorities, 11 LEPs, the DfT, Network Rail, Highways England, East Midlands and Birmingham Airports, Chamber of Commerce and HS2 Ltd. In July 2015 the MC Partnership secured £5 million from Government to help the Midlands develop its vision and strategy for transforming strategic transport connectivity across the region in order to drive economic growth. The final Midlands Connect strategy will be launched in March 2017).
- High Speed Rail 2 (HS2) (Given the County Council's continuing concerns regarding the impact of HS2 on both landscape and residents, it is essential that we work hard to ensure that HS2 brings economic benefit to Staffordshire).
- Northern Gateway Partnership (In addition to working through Midlands Connect to ensure economic benefit from HS2, the County Council is also engaged with the Northern Gateway Partnership that covers a geographical area centred on the proposed HS2 station at Crewe).
- West Midlands Rail Franchise (Through this partnership, SCC will have greater influence over the development, implementation and management of local rail services and facilities in the West Midland Rail Franchise area, including fares, stations, rolling stock, service specification, customer satisfaction and safety and security).
- Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (The County Council continues to work in strong partnership with the SSLEP delivering key transformational projects for the local economy).

(Cabinet – 16 March 2016)

2. Quarter 4 2015/16 Performance Report

The Cabinet have received an overview of the county council's performance (including the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Strategy) and the progress being made in delivering the Council's three priority outcomes at the end of the fourth quarter 2015/16. They noted that:

- Staffordshire continues to perform well in terms of the percentage of the working age population claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). In January 2016, 4,167 residents aged 16-64 claimed JSA (0.8%). The rate remained below the West Midlands (1.9%) and national averages (1.5%).
- As at January 2016, Ofsted monthly management data showed that 81% of all schools in Staffordshire were rated as good or outstanding, compared to 85% nationally. The target is for 90% of schools to be rated as good or outstanding by August 2016.
- Validated Key Stage 4 results for Staffordshire show that 56.1% of pupils achieved five or more A*-C GCSEs including English and maths in 2015. Staffordshire continues to record a result that is above the national average (53.8%) and the gap is widening; from 1.5 percentage points (pp) above the national average in 2014 to 2.3pp above the national average in 2015.
- The first Growth Deal project has been completed at Liberty Park, Lichfield, and two more business parks should be ready in summer 2016 at Bericote Four Ashes and Meaford. It is calculated that these sites, along with the Branston Locks project (which is due to start later in 2016), will provide approximately 8,000 jobs.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2016)

3. Fourth Quarter Budget Monitoring Report

The Cabinet have been informed of the financial position of the county council (including the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Strategy) at the end of the fourth quarter 2015/16. They noted that the latest revenue forecast outturn showed an anticipated overspend of £6.1m (1.3%). The pressures relating to potential loss of income for the Better Care Fund (£6m), increased care packages in All Aged Disability (£2.5m), and Green Waste Recycling Credit pressures (£1.2m) are some of the reasons for this level of forecast overspend. Savings include reductions in Looked After Children and expensive placements (£2m) and Education and Wellbeing savings (£1.4m).

The latest capital outturn projection is £101.9m, compared to the quarter 3 position of £114.5m, a decrease of 11%. There has been some re-profiling of schemes, which accounts for the majority of the decrease, including the A50 project, Keele IC5, Redhill, Dementia Care Programmes and a number of school projects.

(Cabinet – 16 March 2016)

4. Partnerships

Since our last meeting, residents have had the opportunity in parts of the county to have their say at the ballot box in the local elections and OPPC elections – and I welcome David Brookes as our new county councillor for Uttoxeter Town today. Here, at the county council we all have a common goal, regardless of politics or geography, and that is to do the very best we can for the people of Staffordshire that we represent.

As a council we remain absolutely committed to working with all our partners here in Staffordshire, regionally and nationally to help grow the economy and deliver better jobs, help give children the best start in life, support more people to lead healthier, active, independent lives and, crucially, support those who need our help the most with the resources available.

5. Communities

Of course, one of our key partners are communities themselves and in Staffordshire we are fortunate to have an active volunteering network – and community libraries are a prime example of this in action. As we all know, the way people use libraries has changed considerably with the huge rise in ebooks for example and we have had to adapt to meet these modern day needs of library users. However, rather than close libraries, we have opened up doors to communities and I am delighted to say that the first of Staffordshire's community libraries are now up and running, with the rest of the first wave following soon.

Two libraries at Barton and Werrington have transferred to community management and another nine will follow in the coming weeks. It is important to emphasise that these community libraries are still very much part of Staffordshire's library community. They will have access to all the stock and IT network, while the authority remains responsible for agreed utility and maintenance costs, but each has the freedom to decide how it wants to develop and remain relevant to the community it is based in.

6. Staffordshire Day

Residents certainly showed their community spirit when they turned out to celebrate everything that is great about the county on our very first Staffordshire Day on Sunday, 1 May. The date was chosen in a public poll and marks the day Wedgwood founded his factory. Given the success of the first Staffordshire Day, I think we can look forward to seeing the celebrations gather momentum in the years to come.

7. Staffordshire Sport

It looks like 2016 could be a year to remember for sport in Staffordshire. As home to St George's Park, it is always good to see our local football teams do well. This year Stafford Rangers led the way by winning its league, followed by Burton Albion defying the odds to win promotion to the Championship, great for the team and great for the local economy. So huge congratulations to them and we look forward to

welcoming Aston Villa, Nottingham Forest and Derby County to Staffordshire next season.

Closer to home, next month (on 11 and 12 June) Staffordshire will be once again hosting both IRONKIDS and IRONMAN 70.3. The weekend is a fantastic opportunity to not only welcome athletes and supporters, but to showcase what a wonderful county Staffordshire is.

8. Devolution

This Council looks forward to the opportunity to have a conversation with Government, alongside all its local authority and other partners in Staffordshire and Stoke, about public sector reform and the devolution of powers and funding in Stoke and Staffordshire based around the following principles:

- That it should be about creating a strong economy based on a skilled and well educated workforce.
- That it should be about resolving the longstanding problems in the local health economy and driving forward the integration of health and care.
- That it should be about joining up the whole of the public sector in the area and not just local government.
- That it should be outward facing and not just internally focused, building on, rather than replacing, existing relationships and partnerships.
- That it should be based on a long term vision of government and not short term thinking on governance.
- And that governance form should follow function and be both locally determined and genuinely democratic.