

News You Can Use on the Doorstep

Leader's Monthly E-Newsletter for October

From the Leader of the Council

With Labour in disarray coming out of the party conference season, we're starting to build a manifesto platform for the 2017 county council elections. We are also looking ahead to the 2016 Police & Crime Commissioner election and Cannock, Newcastle and Tamworth where a third of seats are up for grabs. With the new Labour leader becoming a laughing stock in his own party let alone with the wider electorate we should be confident of success without taking it for granted.

There are, as usual in politics, some distractions not the least of which is devolution. Staffordshire County Council is committed to strong leadership on devolution, but we are not going to jump on the first train that comes along or we might end up at the wrong destination.

Some people ask what Staffordshire is doing and criticise us for being slow and not developing a proposal. In fact we have an abundance of ideas and opportunities. It would be wrong not to take sufficient time to examine these properly, to explore them further, and to consult as widely as possible.

My worry is that others in the county may have acted too soon and could rapidly find that what they expected is considerably different from what they finally receive. Let's also remember that Staffordshire is the largest economy in the West Midlands after Birmingham.

My Cabinet are involved in various discussions regarding opportunities that could be incorporated or sit alongside a final proposal, or in fact more than one proposal. This doesn't reflect indecision or abandonment of our core values as a council since 2009 when we took control after 28 years' hard Labour. Our view is that more local decisions are needed to benefit local people and we won't abandon this pledge. People want to retain the benefits of living in a shire county and as a result would not like decisions that affect this imposed upon them.

Our intention in this time of change in local and regional government is not to be defensive or protectionist, but to be open, to engage and above all to consult with people and businesses bearing in mind that we have to live within our means. With all that in mind I believe we can achieve a proposal for devolution that meets the need of total Family Staffordshire. Our devolution proposal is still work in progress and we will be presenting, consulting, and sharing this with partners before we take it to government.

As you are aware, talk of all things devolution continues to be in the news, not least here in Staffordshire, particularly around the West Midlands Combined Authority and latterly suggestions of a Mercian Economic Partnership.

This weekend I have also been invited to take part in a discussion on the issues on the Sunday Politics Show. The other main studio guests are scheduled to be the Conservative MP for Telford Lucy Allan and the Labour MP for Birmingham Northfield, Richard Burden. I understand they have also done a pre-recorded interview with Keith Barrow, the Leader of Shropshire Council.

We want to explore what we want it to deliver and it is very much about local decisions to suit local people, a chance to grow our economy and an opportunity to reinvent public services to suit people here

We already have a track record of successfully working with partners on projects, such as the City Deal and i54 South Staffordshire and we will continue to listen to and work with our own district and borough councils and wider county and city partners to build on this success for the benefit of Staffordshire residents and Staffordshire businesses.

In reality, on the ground we know that devolution is already happening, especially around infrastructure and transport. This week alone we have seen the announcement of the [Northern Gateway Development Zone](#) to bring economic benefits to the North of the county and [Midlands Connect](#) – £5 million funding for the development of a regional transport strategy to promote better strategic connectivity across Staffordshire and the Midlands.

Later this month, leaders from the district and boroughs and Stoke-on-Trent City Council will also be sitting down to explore further the devolution debate and we will be sharing feedback from this event.

Philip Atkins

Leader of the Council

Take Pride in Our Inward Investment Record



Staffordshire has a great track record in attracting and equally retaining major investment in the county. And it isn't just about JCB with its new factories, hotel and world-class golf course. Wedgwood has a new visitor centre and hotel. Alstom has located its European centre of development in Staffordshire. Online retailer Amazon has created hundreds of new jobs in Staffordshire. And this private sector investment has been matched by our success in the public sector through the £100 million City Deal and £25 million Growth Deal sites across the county.

And there are many more examples. Council Leader Philip Atkins says: "We have the lowest unemployment (0.8 per cent) not just in the region, but one of the lowest in the UK—Lichfield is among the lowest anywhere in the UK. The latest figures for Staffordshire are the lowest since records began more than 20 years ago. There is more to come as there are still pockets of worklessness and a lack of support to break the unyielding cycle of deprivation.

0.8%

"Our proposal to take advantage of devolution is inevitably going to focus on how we can do this and is likely to involve partners outside the county as well as within. We see this having significant opportunities to boost Districts on top of local investment and District and Town Deals that are part of the overall potential package."

Government Backs Transport Improvement Plans for Staffordshire



The government has backed a major proposed £1.8 billion investment to help improve major routes in West Midlands which includes some £600,000,000 for the total specifically for Staffordshire. Council Leader Philip Atkins says: "This is a is evidence of the Conservative Government and County Council working together and delivering on our promises of rebalancing our nation's economy.

The £1.8 billion Government investment for the West Midlands will help boost connectivity, ease congestion, cut journey times and improve safety on some

of our busiest roads. The work is part of the Government's 'Road Investment Strategy' and was announced by Highways England.

Highlights for Staffordshire and neighbouring areas include:

- * Development of a new link road connecting M54, M6 and the M6 Toll
- * Plan to replace roundabouts at A50 Uttoxeter—a project being delivered by Staffordshire County Council
- * New smart motorway between M6 junctions 13 and 15
- * Improvement for the A38 Derby junctions
- * Widening of the A500 at Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent
- * New, bigger M6 Junction 10

Philip Atkins adds; “These new schemes are a huge boost for Staffordshire as together they will improve connections to the county, ease congestion, cut journey times and help make our busiest roads even safer.

“Good links to the county are good for our residents, good for our business and really underpin our growing economy, so it is great news to see Staffordshire benefit from this investment.”

Staffordshire Authorities Welcome Business Rates Devolution

Local authorities in Staffordshire have given a welcome to the announcement that they will soon be able to keep 100 per cent of the business rates they collect.



Chancellor George Osborne says he plans to make local government self-sufficient by abolishing the revenue support grant but allowing councils to retain all local taxes. At the moment councils only keep up to 50 per cent of their business rates, with the remainder going to central government. These new plans will see £13 billion of taxation devolved by 2020.

The uniform business rate will also be abolished with councils being given the power to lower the amount payable by companies. But only elected mayors will be able to increase business rates. Osborne said the plans were part of a 'devolution revolution,' with councils no longer being required to go to Government 'with a begging bowl..



Ian Parry, Deputy Leader at Staffordshire County Council, believes his authority could be a net 'winner' from devolution. He says: "These proposals should make local authorities financially independent by 2020. But we will need to know details, such as how business rates will be divided between county and district councils. I would say that as county councils are responsible for delivering services such as social care, we should get the bulk of the retained rates.

"As a council we are committed to creating jobs and economic growth and providing the right conditions for businesses to flourish."

Blue-sky Thinking on Improving the Staffordshire Health Economy

It is no secret that Staffordshire's health economy is struggling and costing the taxpayer far too much. It is facing a massive and growing deficit. Although life expectancy is over 80, only 64 years for men and 62 years for women are spent in good health.



Council Leader Philip Atkins says: "Our intention is to try and change that in the interests of patients and the taxpayer. Right now there are 14 or so organisations responsible for health in this county.

There are six Clinical Commissioning Groups in addition to the others responsible for health. And there is significant evidence there is weak coordination and dysfunctional behaviour.

"Our intention would be to show how we can create a new structure for community and primary healthcare, combined with social care and public health which would offer the following benefits:

- Integrate and transform health and social care to a level that ensures health resources are more effectively used and community care more closely aligned.

- Radically simplify the excessive number of different organisations responsible for healthcare in Staffordshire.
- Reduce the total costs so as to reinvest in improvements to health and social care with an immediate potential saving of £200 million through organisational reform.
- Full political accountability to ensure that communities and patients have a clear vision on who is responsible for choices and decisions with additional public participation and consultation.
- Full review of health and social care assets to deliver better single point delivery, integration and to ensure provision meets patient and community needs.
- Better oversight of clinical commissioning and removal of duplication, waste and inefficiency through multiple commissioning in similar clinical areas.
- Ensure that hospital resources and treatments are better used and more effectively joined up with community care facilities to reduce bed-blocking and congestion at A&E.



Alan White Cabinet Member for Adult Care adds:
 “Despite those challenges the county council is committed to showing strong leadership as the largest democratically elected local authority in Staffordshire.

“From community health to our Collaborative Commissioning Congress—a single body that will see councils and NHS partners work together—and through the Health and Wellbeing Board we have the means to challenge and transform our health economy in a way that benefits all residents and makes them healthier.”

“From skills to health, from families to work we need all our public sector partners working together to promote our successes and meet our challenges and achieve for our residents.”

Business Loans Fund Offers Vital Funding to Small Companies

Since the launch of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Business Loan Fund in 2013, it has been instrumental in the success of securing more than 70 loans to small businesses that would not otherwise have had the funding they needed to grow. By June 2015, total loans of more than £1.7 million had safeguarded and created 318 jobs. The county council Cabinet has approved proposals to extend the fund for a further three years. Due to the scale of demand and the progress so far, the proposal is for the county council to provide funding of over £200,000 a year and Stoke £50,000 a year over three years from December 2015.

Once in a Generation Opportunity for Newcastle Town Centre



Newcastle-under-Lyme is to benefit from a new Public Sector Hub bringing together staff from the county council, the borough council, and Staffordshire Police. This will promote greater collaboration between statutory services and make it easier for residents to find all the services they need under one roof. The county council will take

the lead role in developing the building at the former St Giles and St Georges School on a not for profit basis. Speaking at the county council meeting in October members welcome the cross-party approach and welcomed the development as a “once in a generation opportunity” which offers “good value for money.”

County Council Supports Petition Against CCG Hearing Aids Policy

Staffordshire County Council has backed a public petition with over 5,000 signatures calling for North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to implement cuts to NHS hearing aid services. Councillor Alan White, Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing, told the October county council meeting that the administration supports the devolution of health and social care. “We welcome the petition and the fact that it has cross-party support. What has to be understood is that as an administration we can’t dictate policy changes to the CCG but we will seek to influence them.”

Staffordshire Excels at Meeting Parental Preferences for Schools

Staffordshire has delivered an excellent performance this year in meeting parental preferences for reception places at its schools. Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills Ben Adams says that this September 97 per cent of parents received a reception place at one of their top three preferred schools. He adds: "Where an application for a place is refused all parents have the right to an independent admissions appeal."

Superfast Staffordshire Broadband Project Progresses

Superfast broadband will increasingly shape the delivery of public services in Staffordshire, according to Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Transport Mark Winnington. He says: "It will underpin the development and delivery of e-Health and telemedicine services. It is already playing a part in the roll out of Staffordshire Cares, Staffordshire Marketplace and the MyStaffs app. This will serve to ensure that residents benefit from healthier, more independent lives, reducing the effects of rural isolation and providing better access to services.

Citizens will also benefit from an improvement in services and access to remote working, payments on-line, internet banking, shopping, e government, e-learning, video calling, digital medical care, on-demand TV and much more."



By the end of the project around 95,000 premises will have been given access to the fibre network. When combined with the activity delivered by the commercial operators. This will equate to 95 per cent of the premises in Staffordshire which will have access to the superfast broadband network.

Provisional GCSE Results Reflect Focus on Improvement

A strong focus on improvement and ensuring students have a range of opportunities and options have all contributed to improved GCSE results in Staffordshire.

Provisional figures released from last summer's exams show Staffordshire pupils are achieving above the national average in their GCSEs. After steady progress over the past few years, Staffordshire pupils are now 2.5 percentage points above the national average.

Over 55 per cent of pupils in the county achieved 5+ A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths, compared to nearly 53 per cent nationally. This represents nearly 0.5 of

a percentage point increase on 2014, where nationally, results have declined by over 0.5 of a percentage point.

County Councillor Mike Lawrence, Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety says: “Getting the right mix of skills is important for any future career, so the results are an important step in making sure that pupils in Staffordshire are equipped to progress into further education, training or apprenticeships.



“The challenge now is to build on these results and ensure every pupil can reach their full potential and have the best possible chance of succeeding. Along with our school improvement partner Entrust, we will continue supporting schools to improve their results, and ensure pupils of all abilities achieve their potential and have access to the right advice and guidance.”

“I want to congratulate all the pupils who took GCSEs last summer on their success, and wish them every success in the future whatever path they take.”

Race Starts for £350m Staffordshire Construction Framework



Staffordshire County Council has started a hunt for firms to sign up to a construction framework expected to be worth £80m-£350m over the next four years.

The lower end estimate covers works planned directly by the council but could rise if other public sector clients in the region adopt its use.

The council said the framework, which is being split into five lots covering various sizes of traditional public construction projects and modular solutions, is expected to enlist up to 28 firms.

Lot one, which covers new build and refurbishment projects worth up to £2.5m will see a projected total spend of £15m-£50.

Two other lots for projects from £2.5m to £9m and bigger schemes will account for £50m to £220m of work.

A further £15m to £80m is forecast to be spent with modular construction specialists signed up by the council