

News You Can Use on the Doorstep

Leader's Monthly E-Newsletter for December

From the Leader of the Council

Chancellor Announces Extra Funding for Health and Social Care

In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement there was a strong focus on improving health and social care services and extra funding for the NHS in Staffordshire. Alongside this was fairer funding for our schools, for which we have lobbied hard, an increase in funding for major transport projects and the creation of 26 new enterprise zones, one of which is at Ceramic Valley in the north of the county.



That's the good news. The Government still needs to reduce funding across its departments, and tough times still lay ahead but the county council welcomes the extra support and funding being made available for health services and integrated community care. Getting the best care for our older and more vulnerable residents is something we all want to see.

And we have worked hard at these priorities. The county council has already made major improvements in how it works with health partners, including the integration of the county's health and social care services three years ago. And, through the government Better Care Fund we will continue to work more closely with the NHS, pooling our resources to improve services and reduce the pressure on hospitals.



This year we have already specifically invested an extra £20 million in social care and remain at the same time committed to finding better, more innovative, affordable ways to make sure people receive the best value and the best quality health and social care available. In particular, we want to ensure that as few as possible frail elderly people remain in hospital when they could be cared for in the community or at home.

Following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement we are now awaiting our Financial Settlement from Government. This will allow us to finalise our budget and spending plans before bringing our proposals to full council in February. Our aim is to get the maximum value for every pound of taxpayers' money that we receive and every pound we spend.



Changing the focus to transportation there is a mixed picture for our county. We've got the long awaited announcement on the preferred route for accelerated Phase 2a of HS2 and that Crewe will host the station. The route will not only go to Crewe – but the project will be delivered six years

ahead of schedule. While the news will be welcomed by Crewe, the next phase of the project will cut through a further 33 miles of Staffordshire countryside which will be a bitter blow to those communities lying along its route.

Now that the route is confirmed, however, it brings to an end almost two years of uncertainty and means we can focus on getting the best deal for the county and for our communities. We will be working hard with our partners to make sure we mitigate the impact on communities and the environment, ensure meaningful compensation for people affected as well as some of the wider economic benefits of the scheme. Our aim is to engage with Government, HS2 Ltd, district and borough councils, and neighbouring authorities. We plan to build on the partnership of Midlands Connect to deliver better connectivity for all Staffordshire.

Back to the countryside and a subject that's close to all our hearts. As an 80 per cent rural county, it's important we support our rural businesses and we are pleased to announce the brand new Staffordshire LEADER programme which will help us boost our rural economy. There's around £2.5 million in funding available to a range of businesses or for those entrepreneurs who spot a gap in the market that will create jobs. Grants of £2,500 to £40,000 are being made available to individuals who need a little help in getting their 'big idea' off the ground. Funding up to 40 per cent of the total project costs is available, though more can be awarded in exceptional circumstances. There's more information at www.staffsleader.org.uk

Councillor Philip Atkins

Leader of the Council

County Council Rises to Meet Winter Onset Challenges

In November Staffordshire got a real taste of winter with the temperatures dropping to below zero in most parts of the county and with this, we saw our gritting crews in action for the first time.

Our road gritting crews worked much of the nights to keep roads clear and moving, treating our A and B roads as necessary.



The county council's 40 plus gritters work out of five depots located across the county with nine weather stations giving decision makers the information they need. And, with 20,000 tonnes of salt stock piled we're well prepared for what mother nature has in store for us over the next few months.

On routine winter days and nights, crews will focus on the major routes, extending to the wider network in prolonged ice and snow conditions. Even when roads are gritted though, our advice is to slow down, drive with extra care and always allow extra time for journeys. People can find out more about where our teams grit and how they decide at www.staffordshire.gov.uk/winter



Staying with winter for a moment longer, the county council has also been encouraging as many people as possible to take up the flu vaccination, especially those who are eligible for a free one. Flu can be a particularly nasty illness, and for children, the elderly and those with existing health needs, it can be even more severe.

This is why we are encouraging all of those eligible for a free flu vaccination to take up the offer and ensure they stay healthy throughout the winter months. You can find out more about it and other tips for keeping well at www.staffordshirecares.info.

Next Steps in Devolution—How to Make it Work for Staffordshire

Devolution continues to dominate local government news with “devolution deals” being announced on a fairly regularly basis. Here in Staffordshire, we want to work with our partners across the public sector including districts and boroughs and Stoke-on-Trent City Council to explore what we would want from devolution and how best to make it work for Staffordshire’s residents.



As a Conservative council, we believe that local decisions to suit local people are a good thing. They are a chance to change our economy, invest in infrastructure and reinvent public services locally to suit local people. We have seen through transport infrastructure partnerships such as Midlands Connect that in many ways devolution is already happening. We already have our own City, District and Town “deals” in place and working in Staffordshire.



In October, we had a highly productive meeting with leaders from the boroughs, districts and Stoke and I know that many county councillors also attended the members’ devolution briefings last month. The next steps are to continue this work with all our Members, our public and private sector partners and examine areas such as the skills and community health agenda in more detail.

Growth Deal Projects Make Progress with Branston Locks Next Up

Projects financed through the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent growth deal in Staffordshire for 2015-16 and 2016-17 are progressing. For 2015-16 these involve the Bericote Four Ashes Employment Site, the Lichfield Park Employment Site and the Meaford Business Park. In 2016-17 the focus



switches to Branston Locks, Burton on Trent, where infrastructure works associated with the Branston Locks projected will be completed in June 2017.

Alongside the identified Local Growth allocations, the delivery of these projects will see contributions of £9 million from private sector developers, which are estimated to create more than 8,200 jobs.

Lichfield Gets Boost from Liberty Park Completion

Liberty Park Lichfield is one of the county council's exciting projects being developed along with Liberty Property Trust and its partner Stoford Developments. The new £4 million project was due for completion at the end of November and will be the first of the Government's Growth Deal funded schemes in the area.



Work on site has involved the construction of a new railway bridge over the West Coast Mainline, and once complete will include new industrial and warehousing units, again attracting over 1,000 jobs to the county. Getting the infrastructure in place has been complex but now means the developer can get on with the job of attracting interest from potential occupiers which is great news for the area.

Andrew Blevins, Managing Director at Liberty Property Trust, says: "Liberty Park is an important example of Staffordshire County Council working with industry to enable commercial development and jobs to come to Lichfield.

"The new access infrastructure, which is opening up the development site, has been jointly funded by Government and Liberty Property Trust. Since Liberty Park was launched in March this year, it has already attracted interest from potential occupiers well-placed to create jobs and economic growth for the region."

My Staffs App for Parents

Parents with children under five looking for information on the move might be interested to hear about the latest addition to the My Staffs App. The new tile provides information on family planning, pregnancy, baby, toddler and pre-school parenting, along with a looking after you section. One in three people that access our services online now do so from a mobile device and this is expected to increase over the next few years. And with people leading increasingly busier lives and getting jobs done on the move, it is vital that we make it as easy and efficient as possible for them to do so. The 'My Staffs App' is free and can be downloaded from the Apple App store and Google Play Stores.



Stafford Library Boosts New Customers Even Before Opening

The new Stafford Library was officially opened last month by Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.



Ben Adams, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, says: "We're very excited about the new library and it's proving highly successful—open almost three months now. In the first month we saw an increase in the number of new customers by almost 50 per cent and almost 3,000 reservations for use of

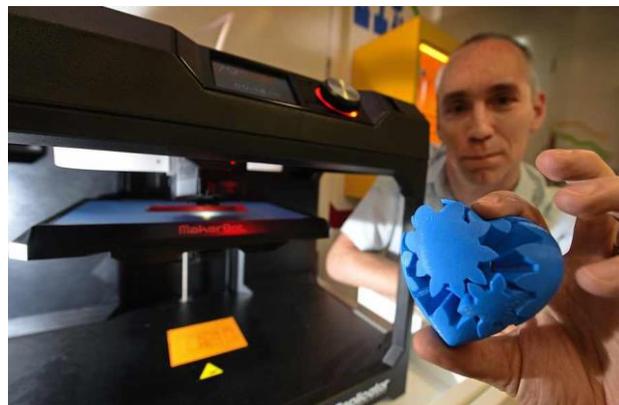
the computers. 610 new people joined in the first two months.

"Our new library is fantastic and we're incredibly pleased with the success and feedback from customers so far. Not only have we seen a big increase in people joining the library in the first month but record numbers of people are coming in to use the computers too.

"It really has something for everyone. There is space for people to meet, for reading groups, nursery visits, local history talks, jobs advice sessions and cultural and craft activities and much more and it's all on one floor for ease of use. We also hope the new space and digital technologies will help motivate and inspire young people, while developing their skills in science, technology, engineering and maths."

There are touchscreen tables, computer tablets and two state-of-the-art 3D printers.

The library is also one of the first in the country to offer Wi-Fi printing. In the first month of opening the library saw almost 3,000 reservations for use of the computers.



County Continues With Balanced Economy and Increasing Opportunities

Near full employment with the latest Jobseekers Allowance claimant figure now continuing at 0.8 per cent, (an all-time low) is further evidence that Staffordshire has an economy that is balanced with increasing new opportunities.



Among the achievements are developments at the new business innovation centre at Keele University Science and Innovation Park which could help create 130 jobs. This £7 million centre is aimed at high growth businesses, providing high-quality office and workshop accommodation.



In the south of the county, development continues to gather pace at Cannock Chase district's flagship Kingswood Lakeside business park and likewise at Redhill in Stafford. At i54 South Staffordshire the council has also just confirmed sale of three more plots. This is all part of our vision and ongoing drive to bring innovative business and new better paid jobs to the people of Staffordshire.

In addition to growing the economy and creating jobs, helping to develop the voluntary sector also remains one of our priorities. Helping us achieve this is VAST, and last month we welcomed the Duke of Kent for the opening of its new Hub in Stafford.

What is VAST? VAST provides practical support services to voluntary and community groups on a wide range of subjects including bidding for funding, recruiting volunteers, staff training and how to tender for contracts. Having VAST at the heart of the voluntary sector is great news for our local communities and has given them an excellent base from which to deliver their services. Alternative other help and advice is also available at www.justact.org.uk



The voluntary and community sector play an important role in helping improve the lives of people in Staffordshire and it's vital that these initiatives and organisations are supported.



From the voluntary hub now to the new Carers Hubs, giving carers of all ages and circumstances access to local support services. The new Carers Hubs, one in Hanley and one in Stafford, will provide information and advice, support groups, activities, and training. It will arrange referrals to other organisations where specialist help is needed.

We know that carers play a vital role in our society. Every day thousands of people in Staffordshire provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner.

It's important to remember that carers will need support themselves at some point too so having the Hubs will give them somewhere to turn to for help and advice when they need it.

Staffordshire Children Outperform West Midlands Average

Provisional unvalidated data for 2015 shows that there has been a significant increase in the percentage of 4-5 year olds achieving a good level of development at Early Years Foundation Stage. The provisional figures suggest that Staffordshire (70.0 per cent) performed better than the national (66.3 per cent) and West Midlands (64.3 per cent) averages.

In August 2015, the looked after children population in Staffordshire was 986. In terms of recent regional benchmarking, the number of looked after children in Staffordshire was slightly lower than comparative local authorities based on levels of deprivation. Staffordshire's rate per 10,000 population at the end of Quarter 4, 2014/15 was 54.7 compared to the West Midlands rate of 75.

In Staffordshire, the number of children subject of a child protection plan at the end of August 2015 was 664, which is similar to August 2014 (674). The latest benchmark figures from Quarter 1, 2015/16 show that the rate of children subject of a child protection plan per 10,000 was 36.9 which is lower than the regional rate of 47.8.

More Good news for Our County Town

More good news for Stafford this time round with plans being approved for the new Stafford Western Access Route and another milestone achieved at the new Redhill Industrial Park.

Plans for the new Stafford Western Access Route which will help cut congestion and support new homes and growth in the town got the green light from planners. Stafford has seen significant development over the past few years which is helping to secure the town's future prosperity and keeping it attractive to potential investors. But, we all know how congested the town centre can be at certain times and with more development planned, it's vital to act now.

The project is being backed by the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Local Enterprise Partnership funded through the Government's Growth Deal. The new road will help ease congestion on the Newport Road east of Kingsway, Station Road, Chell Road, Gaol Square and the A34 Foregate Street south of the scheme. Work on the first section could start as early as summer or autumn 2016.

Keeping with Stafford, Trebor Developments, working with US firm Rockspring also had its plans for a new industrial development on the Redhill site approved with construction able to start in the New Year. The fact that the site is almost fully occupied, and with just two plots left, is great news for Staffordshire. This brings added confidence to potential investors and is further evidence that companies are wanting to invest and do their business here in Staffordshire.

Wishing all our readers a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year!

