

News You Can Use on the Doorstep

Leader's Monthly E-Newsletter for March

Looking Beyond the Budget Towards Our Staffordshire Priorities

Despite all the media froth around the recent Budget, Middle England including Staffordshire is faring best from six years of George Osborne. Statistics show that working parents and pensioners have saved thousands of pounds thanks to his budgets. Many families will be better off due to the Chancellor's decision to raise the amount that people can earn without paying tax to £11,500 and to increase the higher rate tax threshold to £45,000.



The moves announced by the Chancellor will leave more cash in the pockets of workers, offer a freeze on fuel prices and protect measures to safeguard children's health.

In Staffordshire, we have already seen the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance fall to 0.8 per cent and as a county council we are committed to helping more people get better quality jobs.

According to respected accountancy firm PwC the biggest gainers will be working parents who both pay basic rate tax. The Chancellor has been particularly generous to pensioners since he has been in office. According to PwC it is some of the highest earning who have actually lost out since the Chancellor took office despite the myths Labour generates.

Remembering the upcoming May elections, Staffordshire's growing economy is the vital part of our plan to deliver strong public services. While we have a legal and moral responsibility to care for the vulnerable we must look to the future and the imposing pressures on our budget. We can mitigate this through smarter commissioning but it's not just about saving money but ensuring that we support our growing ageing population.



We also know that there is another major challenge ahead. From 2020 local councils will have to pay their own way, without Government subsidy and this means raising funds in Staffordshire from the efficient but fair collection of business rates and council tax.

On the plus side of the balance sheet, our economy is second only to Birmingham's in the Midlands, the number of people in work has reached record highs with more of our working age population in skilled jobs as we continue to lay the foundations for future expansion through multi-million pound infrastructure projects for our connected county.

Here is what the numbers tell us. Our overall economy has grown by 20 per cent and the manufacturing sector by 50 per cent, both since 2009 when Conservatives took control of the council. We've created an extra 18,000 jobs in the county since 2011 and are continuing to focus our efforts on increasing skills levels so people are able to take on the better paid jobs of the future.

We are in a good place because of the hard work we have all put in to get here. There is good news for Newcastle too with proposals for the new £15.4 million civic hub in the centre of the town moving a step closer. Plans got the go ahead from planners at the start of March and the four storey building, which will stand to the south of Queens Gardens, is scheduled for opening in June 2017.



It's exciting times for the town and will certainly be one of the biggest developments in Newcastle for a generation. Bringing together staff from the Borough and County Council, along with the Police under one roof will not only make accessing services easier for the public but will save taxpayers millions of pounds over time.

The Hub, along with the new Ryecroft projects, new bigger retailers, several hundred students and workers will also help boost the local Newcastle economy which has never been so important.

Improving Adult Social Care in Staffordshire



As it is now clear the funding of the support of a growing ageing population, of over 65s and over 80s in particular, is both a huge priority and a major financial pressure. In this year's county council budget we have been obliged to add 2 per cent to the council tax to meet this commitment so as to ensure a balanced budget.

Here in Staffordshire we want to help people lead healthy, independent lives for as long as possible, focusing on more prevention, getting people help early and supporting better health in the community. Delivering integrated health and social care is key to our ambitions working with our partners in the NHS.

For example, Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust provides community health services and adult social care in Staffordshire and health services in Stoke on Trent.

These services range from district nursing, health visiting, school nursing, running five community hospitals and managing health services in six prisons through to providing very specialist community care through dedicated staff.

The Partnership Trust is the biggest integrated health and social care provider in the UK and currently offers health and social care to adults living in Staffordshire (outside of Stoke-on-Trent) through its integrated care locality teams. The 32 teams give people access to a one-stop service for all their health and care needs.

The trust serves a population of 1.1 million people and employs in the region of 6,000 staff. It is located within the geographical boundaries of Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council and contains a number of urban centres including Stoke-on-Trent, Leek, Burton-upon-Trent, Cannock, Lichfield, Stafford, Tamworth and Wombourne, although the geographic area is largely rural.



New Director to Help Shape Health and Social Care



A new director has been appointed by Staffordshire County Council to help shape health and social care. Dr Richard Harling, a former A&E doctor, takes up the newly-created role of director for health and care in the spring.

Dr Harling, currently director of adult services and health at Worcestershire County Council, will lead on working with partners on the care of adults and public health of both children and adults.

Council Leader Philip Atkins, says: "How we help our growing ageing population in Staffordshire is one of the biggest challenges facing our county, so it is vital that we focus even more on supporting people to be well, to keep well and hopefully to get well as quickly as possible.

"Together with all our partners we need to deliver a fully integrated, robust and affordable health and social care approach which helps Staffordshire's residents lead active, healthy and independent lives for as long as possible.

"In Richard, we have found a truly exceptional candidate, who has both the experience and vision to lead on the health and care agenda for Staffordshire in an integrated and innovative way."

Dr Harling, started his career as a doctor in the A&E department of a London hospital. He has a professional background in public health and has held several senior roles in the NHS. He has been leading adult social care in Worcestershire for the past three years.

He says: "Staffordshire has been swift to recognise the need for sustainable, integrated care in local communities. I am delighted to be given the opportunity to build on this in my appointment to this new role.

"I am really looking forward to working with partners in Staffordshire, colleagues and the public to improve the quality and lives of Staffordshire residents."

Review of Staffordshire Post-16 Education and Training Institutions

It goes without saying that matching young adults with the right skills, education and training to get the right jobs is a key priority in Staffordshire given our growth economy and rising aspirations. That's why the current review of post-16 education and training is so important and the hope is to have outcomes by the summer to properly skill the workforce of tomorrow as well as today.



The steering group managing the review will make its recommendations later this spring. Members include chairs of governors from each institution, LEPs, FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners, local authorities, funding agencies, regional school commissioners and representatives from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education.

Ben Adams, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, told the county council at its March meeting: "Without pre-empting the outcomes of the review the early options are to consider mergers between institutions and rationalisation of assets with solutions by the summer. There is an urgency to this.

"We have skills gaps today that need remedies and higher level training in our colleges and sixth forms could be improved. There are, of course some excellent sixth forms but every child deserves a good education. The right foundation of learning and skills is vital for our young people to access good jobs and live healthier, happier and independent lives for this generation and the next.

"Staffordshire's Learning and Skills Strategy challenges every one of the county's 400 schools to be rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, it also recognises that educating young people to take advantage of the skilled and hi-tech job opportunities in the county involves more than obtaining academic qualifications."

Council Leader Philip Atkins added: "The area review is an opportunity to bring our educational offer together so there are no longer wide variations. Not many of us are school governors. Services such as career path advice and guidance needs to be properly done and it would be good to ask the children what are the barriers to their education?"

Staffordshire Local Community Fund Supports 676 Projects



The success of the Staffordshire Local Community Fund has been validated by the impressive figures so far for 2015/2016. This is a plan supported by the current Conservative administration which gives every Staffordshire County Councillor, regardless of party, a generous allocation of funds to spend on supporting community projects in the area.

The only major condition is that any project that receives a grant needs to contribute to the council's three priority outcomes which are:

- Be able to access more good jobs and feel the benefit of economic growth
- Be healthier and more independent
- Feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community

In 2015/16 to date the funding committed to projects so far is £579,987 with £27,696 pending but in addition approximately £1, 157, 287 of match funding has been generated, against total project costs of more than £1.8 million.

Members reacted positively to the news describing the Local Community Fund as "a hidden gem in the work of the council" and one of the "glories of being a county councillor." Council Leader Philip Atkins said the vast majority of grants were made appropriately but there was always a risk of building dependency into the system because at the end of the day this was taxpayers' money and certainly should not be used to fund people's private businesses.

Lichfield Will Gain a First-Class Accessible Library

Staffordshire County Council has underwritten the future of Lichfield Library with a pledge that under

proposed plans it will provide a first-class accessible library for now and future generations. Ben Adams, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills robustly swatted away false rumours circulated by the Green Party about threats to the library service in the city. In response to a council question he said: “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 March 4 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.”

Cannock Gets £20 million Distribution Centre

Work is set to begin on the new £20 million First Choice distribution centre at Kingswood Lakeside – which is expected to create more than 100 jobs once it is finished. The sale of the 5.8 acre plot of land at the Cannock business park to First Choice Catering has been approved by council bosses, with work ‘in the next couple of weeks’.

Mark Winnington has praised the development: “Agreeing the land deal is a significant milestone for this development at Kingswood Lakeside as it means construction work can begin. This is good news for Cannock and for Staffordshire as we’re retaining a big company and enabling it to expand, with even more jobs set to be created. Kingswood Lakeside is one of the county’s main business sites and one developed by the county council. It’s therefore also pleasing to see another development there – Hellermann Tyton’s new HQ – nearing completion.”

County Council Plays a Role in the Devolution Debate

The Conservative administration at the County Council is engaged with the devolution debate in the county but is opposed to having an elected mayor. Council Leader Philip Atkins told the council: “The last thing we want is an elected mayor because there are enough layers of government already.”

However, members heard of progress in the debate around what devolution might mean for Staffordshire although with no model as yet agreed a lot of work lies ahead. A meeting of the Staffordshire Strategic Partnership at the end of February provided an excellent opportunity to focus on the devolution agenda.



Philip continued by saying: “The partnership really is a great platform to work together as a whole rather than individuals to explore in greater detail how passing more powers and funding down from Central Government could help us all deliver greater benefits to the county and to our communities.

“We need to know what it will mean for residents in our area and how it will create better quality jobs and get them to these jobs with the appropriate training. We also need to ensure that the community health side is considered so as to keep people healthy for as long as possible.

“We remain committed to developing these proposals further and will look to include wider public and private sector partners across Staffordshire in the next phase of discussions.”

Scrutiny Committee Works to Combat Child Sexual Exploitation

It's uncomfortable to confront but child sexual exploitation (CSE) is not confined to places like Rotherham but in many other settings even in largely rural counties. This is why we owe a debt of gratitude for the hard work of our Staffordshire County Council Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee led by its chairman Conservative County Councillor John Francis.



In its latest report members followed up on the impact of missing children on CSE. They were told that all the children that had gone missing were accounted for but critically now more information on the length of time children had gone missing would be provided. The committee has initiated considerable progress in reforms to licensing practice in Staffordshire. Councillor Francis says: "The committee has raised concerns about the low level of enforcement relating to CSE and taxi licensing. Each local authority in Staffordshire has a different approach to this issue."

Staffordshire Appoints UK's First Ever Woman Chief Fire Officer

Becci Bryant is the first woman in the UK to have achieved the prestigious position of Chief Fire Officer (CFO) after beginning her career as an operational firefighter in 1992. She will officially replace the outgoing CFO on April 18.



She joined Staffordshire Fire and Rescue in 2005 and In 2010, Becci Bryant took on the challenge of leading the Business Transformation Team. She was then appointed as Director of Organisational Development where she led the joint fire control project between Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and West Midlands Fire

Service. Becci Bryant's appointment demonstrates our commitment to diversity. Staffordshire also has a woman Chief Constable Jane Sawyers which makes Staffordshire a unique partnership of the emergency services that protect our community in the UK.