

News You Can Use on the Doorstep

Leader's Monthly E-Newsletter for May

From the Leader of the Council

Let's Get Out the Vote and Back Our Candidates in Staffordshire

Elections next week could be a catastrophe for Labour especially with the internal strife among the socialists over antisemitism and the suspension of a Labour MP and Ken Livingstone. Many Labour supporters in local elections in Staffordshire will be dismayed at the weakness of their Party Leader's approach and are likely to stay at home especially as the row continues to rumble on in the media.



We also have the added challenge of the Police and Crime Commissioner election where we need to return our candidate Matthew Ellis with a renewed mandate.

Nationwide, Labour faces major local election losses— the clock is ticking and poll analysis shows that Labour is on course to suffer its worst result in opposition for 34 years at the local elections, according to analysis by Professor John Curtice for the Telegraph.



It warns that Labour will lose 170 councillors and control of a string of councils in the South East if people vote as the polls suggest. The study by Prof Curtice, politics lecturer at Strathclyde University and president of the British Polling Council, indicates that even if the party draws level with the Conservatives in national polling they are expected to lose 120 councillors, while dropping four points behind would see a loss of 220 Labour councillors.

Losing 170 seats would be worse than any Labour performances in opposition since 1982, when the party lost 225 seats. Labour could also lose control of key councils including Cannock Chase, Crawley, Redditch and Southampton. Prof Curtice says: "Given that Labour are currently still behind in the polls, albeit

less than a few weeks ago, it seems almost inevitable that Labour will lose council seats on May 5." Labour moderates warned the result would be a "tragedy" and that the party leadership would have to "take some responsibility" for the losses.

Newcastle could go to Conservative coalition control as well. It is an interesting scenario for Staffordshire and Stoke but Conservative successes will depend on a major effort to get out the vote.

More About the Police and Crime Commissioner Election on May 5

The PCC policy was essentially a Conservative Party one from the beginning, with the Liberal Democrats wanting to reform, not abolish, police authorities. The Conservative Party manifesto in 2010 included a promise to replace police authorities with directly-elected individuals. Matthew Ellis, the Conservative candidate for PPC for Staffordshire, has done a highly competent job in his first term of office and deserves our full support.



Although Home Secretary Theresa May has recognised that there have been some disappointing aspects of the way the PCC policy has worked elsewhere in the country, she and the Conservative party remain committed to the policy. As part of the Policing and Crime Bill 2016 the Government is seeking to strengthen the office of PCC by giving it greater powers, particularly in the area of collaboration between emergency services.

Police budgets have been reduced since 2010 and police forces are expected to improve services by making them more efficient. The Government sees collaboration between police forces and with other emergency services as key to achieving this, but have been disappointed with the rate at which this has been happening. The powers for PCCs in the bill would act as a catalyst for this kind of change.



County Councils Win Concessions on Academies

The Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan has responded to concerns about government's ambition to make all schools academies raised by the County Councils Network to which Staffordshire belongs by acknowledging the valuable roles of councillors and school governors.



She said in a statement: “As Conservatives, we share the ambition of extending opportunity to all. That is why education is at the heart of the Government’s mission because we all know that a good education can transform a child’s future.

“I want to reassure you that as we work towards a school system where every school is an academy there will be a crucial role for councillors and school governors. Local authorities will continue to play a key role in our education system by supporting, commissioning and providing services for children and parents.



“In the recently published White Paper: ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’, we set out our vision where local authorities, rather than running schools directly, act as champions for the interests of parents – focussing on:

- Ensuring every child has a school place – working with local schools to ensure there are sufficient places and, where needed, appropriate transport arrangements.
- Ensuring that the needs of vulnerable pupils are met – assessing the needs of and commissioning support for children with special educational needs, safeguarding responsibilities for all children, ensuring school attendance and acting as a corporate parent for looked after children.
- Being a champion for all parents and families – co-ordinating admissions and admissions appeals, championing high standards locally and lobbying the best academy trusts to come to your communities and encourage high-quality free school applications.



“These are hugely important functions and the effective delivery of them will play a major role in ensuring that children and young people achieve their potential regardless of their background. We want you to champion educational excellence in your communities building on wider

responsibilities for economic growth and prosperity.

“We will work with you over the coming months to ensure you have clear guidance about expectations and roles and responsibilities in these areas. We will also remove responsibility for school improvement, on which Ofsted currently inspect local authorities, from you as more schools become academies.”

Unemployment Falls Again in Staffordshire

The latest unemployment (JSA claimant count) figures for March 2016 have just been released. The claimant rate for Staffordshire has decreased on the previous month now standing at 3,955 or 0.7 per cent.

There are 329,574 now in employment in Staffordshire with an increase over the past year of 14,731. Self-employed, voluntary workers and those working their own business are not included in these figures.

With so many employed and such a small number of people claiming JSA across Staffordshire, this is good news for everyone in the county and means people are making the most of the opportunities on offer. Our challenge still is to attract better paid skilled jobs, not just jobs for the sake of employment. Other areas still have that challenge.



HS2 Fires the Starting Pistol for Regional Economic Growth

The decision to build the HS2 £50 billion high speed rail project through Staffordshire has understandably aroused concerns of residents on the preferred route of the second phase. But it has also fired the starting pistol in a race for the region surrounding Crewe and Stoke-on-Trent to regain its historic position in the vanguard of British commerce and industry.

Shrewd investors will recognise the opportunity how a region with low unemployment and a skilled workforce offers unique latent potential in human capital, low operating costs, infrastructure and geography with quality of life. Staffordshire County Council has listened to the concerns of residents living along the preferred route and continues to make representations to the promoters of HS2 on their behalf. That job is ongoing.



Lying at the heart of the country, the Northern Gateway Development Zone has unparalleled transport links, of which HS2 is only the latest addition. Motorways and primary roads fan out in all directions. The decision to site the HS2 station at Crewe greatly increases the capability of this long-established rail hub, allowing the rest of the network to operate at a much greater capacity.

With four major airports lying within one hour's travel, the options for air travel are virtually limitless. The newly-extended Port of Liverpool, slightly more than one hour's drive away, with its new container terminal to join its cruise terminal servicing the luxury liner trade, completes the picture.

Staffordshire is an area, where vocational skills are highly valued, reflected in the quality of its colleges and universities, and the diverse offer that they make to their students. A strong Further Education sector is focussed on working with business to train and up-skill the next generation of workers and leaders. The county council supports a higher than national average proportion of people working in manufacturing with leading brands active in Staffordshire including Jaguar Land Rover and Alstom to name but two.

Clash of Cultures Impedes Integrated Health and Social Care Commissioning

“Apart from the pressures on our own overall budgets, we have a local health service reluctant to contribute to preventing our frail elderly residents’ health deteriorating further.” Councillor Philip Atkins, Leader of Staffordshire County Council, spoke to Hospital Services Magazine editor John Whelan



It goes almost without saying but in the words of Alistair Burt, Minister of State at the Department of Health, “good social care enriches lives and gives people independence and dignity.” This message is reinforced by the current Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt as well as by the Five Year Forward View from NHS England which commands cross party support.



The commissioning imperative to deliver joined up health and social care is clear but nevertheless daunting for a typical tier-one local authority such as Staffordshire County Council, a largely rural county with 850,000 people and a statutory responsibility for both health and social care.

Hospital Services Magazine says: “In the words of County Council Leader Philip Atkins how we help our growing frail 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 residents lead active, healthy and independent lives for as long as possible.”



Commissioning is key to that vision but also a relatively new world for local government because traditionally services were provided by council staff and “outsourcing” was a dirty word for many local authorities. Since 2009 when the Conservatives took control, Staffordshire has broken the mould

and reached out to the CCGs and the NHS with the memory of the Mid Staffs crisis still fresh in many memories. The authority has just recruited a top flight professional in Dr Richard Harling, a former A&E doctor, into a newly created role of director for health and care to cover both the care of adults and public health of both children and adults. That appointment alone suggests a commitment to integrated health and social care. Dr Harling, previously with Worcestershire, 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.”

Yet despite fine words and worthy ambitions Staffordshire faces severe challenges—not the least of which is the continuing abyss of “culture clash” between local authority commissioners and their counterparts in the NHS and in particular the six CCGs in the county. Unless this can be resolved the ideal of delivering “affordable sustainable integrated care for the benefit of Staffordshire families” won’t be achievable soon.



The Culture Hasn’t Changed

Councillor Atkins again: “The problem for commissioning in health and social care is that the people involved from both the NHS and the local authority sides talk with their own ideas while their culture hasn’t changed. They often mistake commissioning for procurement and look at it as buying more for less when what matters most is outcomes. Commissioners need to be people who define how outcomes should be achieved and continually monitor progress and delivery of the strategy. The overall challenge comes down to three

important priorities—culture change, setting priorities, and getting the language right.”

And Staffordshire is a bellwether county for commissioning. The Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust provides community health services and adult social care in Staffordshire and health services in the city of Stoke on Trent. The Partnership Trust is the biggest integrated health and social care provider in the UK and employs 6,000 staff.

To complicate commissioning further there is the added challenge of working with six different CCGs in the county. The Council Leader instinctively feels commissioning would improve if there were fewer CCGs. He returns to the issue of culture change and fears that often health sector bodies are dominated by former NHS insiders who look at issues through “rose tinted NHS spectacles.” Councillor Atkins says: “CCG mergers would undoubtedly help to improve commissioning in Staffordshire and deliver on our commitment to bring about integrated health and social care. Whilst reducing the deficit is key, it isn’t just about reducing costs it’s more about delivering better outcomes for our residents.”

Adult social care isn’t ,of course, the only commissioning responsibility of the county council because it is also responsible for children’s services with around 970 looked after children, a further 3,700 children who are at risk and as many as 10,000 other



children that need some level of monitoring. Here there are different challenges from working with the

Every child
DESERVES
a family.

CCGs with children often placed in children’s homes in the county by local authorities from Aberdeen to the Isle of Wight. Staffordshire aims to tackle this challenge imaginatively and is looking at potentially collaborating with nearby local authorities, such as Sandwell and Dudley on fostering and adoption services. It perhaps helps that local authorities, even if they have different political control, still at least speak the same language but effective commissioning still remains the major challenge.