

## News You Can Use on the Doorstep

### Leader's Monthly E-Newsletter for December

## Conservatives offer new hope for Britain with the Autumn Statement

The UK economy is forecast to be the fastest growing major economy in 2016 and the good news is that growth remains positive and employment continues to rise in each of the next five years, with half a million more people forecast to be in work by 2021. Staffordshire will play a major part in this recovery after years of spineless and rudderless policies under Labour's faceless men and women before 2006.



In the Autumn Statement the Chancellor made it clear that although the government has cut borrowing by nearly two-thirds since 2010, we will no longer aim for a budget surplus (where more tax is raised than is spent) by 2019.



He argued that new fiscal targets are needed to provide the flexibility to support the economy and create space for more investment in roads, rail, research, and housing.

The government has, therefore, set new fiscal targets which aim for a 2 per cent underlying deficit with debt falling by 2020, and a balanced budget as soon as possible thereafter.

This clearly makes sense given the need to settle the economy down after Brexit and will build an economy that works for all. In the meantime there is some good news for Staffordshire residents—fuel duty will remain frozen for a seventh year, saving drivers £130 a year on average.

And there will be more pounds in your pockets. The government is committed to raising the Personal Tax Allowance to £12,500 and the Higher Rate Threshold to £50,000 by 2020-21. The Personal Allowance is the amount of income you can earn before you start paying income tax. It is currently £11,000 this year, and will rise to £11,500 in 2017-18. The point at which you pay the higher rate of income tax will increase from £43,000 this year, to £45,000 in 2017-18. This will help our hard working families in Staffordshire.



The National Living Wage and the National Minimum Wage will increase from April 2017 helping those on lower incomes.

The National Living Wage for those aged 25 and over will increase from £7.20 per hour to £7.50 per hour. That means over £1,400 a year more for a full-time worker previously on the National Minimum Wage. The National Minimum Wage will also increase.

Government has announced a major new investment in transport infrastructure. As part of the National Productivity Investment Fund, this will cover £1.1 billion to reduce congestion and upgrade local roads and public transport and £220 million to tackle road safety and congestion on Highways England roads. Staffordshire is already benefiting from investment in its roads.



As part of the government's commitment to providing certainty for business the rural rate relief will increase from 50 per cent to 100 per cent in April 2017, saving a business up to £2,900 a year.

This business rate relief is available to businesses in rural areas with a population under 3,000, where that business is the only village shop or post office with a rateable value of up to £8,500, or the only public house or petrol station with a rateable value of up to £12,500.

## **Staffordshire gets good news on more apprenticeships**

The debate on the Leader's report to December council highlighted several positive developments with members expressing satisfaction at the low level of unemployment in the county and the 5,000 apprenticeships.



However, Philip Atkins pointed out that 87 per cent of the county council's expenditure was focused on four per cent of the population, and of that 70 per cent of expenditure was centred on two per cent of the population. This illustrates the need to work as collaboratively as possible with partners.

Ben Adams, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills, said the quality of today's existing apprenticeships is good and he forecast that there will be another 5,000 apprenticeships in the next three to four years. However, there was more that could be done to "talk up the value of apprenticeships to employers" and support them with technical and vocational pathways including public services and healthcare as well as the more traditional routes in support of industries and manufacturing.

## **County schools on a rising curve of improvement**

Staffordshire schools are on a fast track to improvement. In response to a council question the Leader of the Council Philip Atkins emphasised that the county council supports "greater autonomy of schools and recognises that the capacity to manage their budgets and drive improvement resides in the schools." He said: "We are currently in a school-led system of school improvement through teaching in schools and other alliances continues to mature.

"At the end of August 2016 86 per cent of schools were judged to be good or outstanding. This is an increase of five percentage points since this time last year and 21 percentage points since September 2012. The county council school improvement service has played a part in this success by offering challenge and support to the leaders of maintained schools and by commissioning Entrust to provide training and specialist advice."

## **Responding to petitioners on drug and alcohol funding...**

There was lots of media coverage on the petition presented to Full Council in December on the funding for the BAC O'Connor Centre in Newcastle. The centre is due to close after the decision was taken to reduce funding for drug and alcohol services to help meet the £15 million shortfall from the NHS in the Better Care Fund.



**SIGN THE  
PETITION**

The response to the petitioners was as follows. “The Council thanks the petitioners and understand the issues raised and will send the drug and alcohol funding petition to all Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Groups, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Department of Works and Pensions for their consideration. They have benefited from the work of this council and they are asked to consider additional financial support in addition to that the county council continues to give.”

### **...and to a separate petition about debt, benefit and consumer advice**

The Council responded to the petition by proposing several actions and initiatives. The motion passed stating as follows: “Staffordshire County Council thanks the petitioners for their concern and interest. As a late submission from the Citizens Advice Bureau was received prior to our Corporate Review Meeting on 22 November, this Council supports the Corporate Review decision that the issue around funding for Citizens Advice Bureau be referred back to the Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing (Cllr Alan White) and that information around this petition be sent to all District and Borough Councils and be added to the evidence to be considered before a final decision is made.”

### **...plus consideration of a petition about the proposed closure of community care beds**

The Leader of the Council Cllr Philip Atkins proposed: “Council thanks the petitioners and accept it. The proposed closure of community beds petition will be sent to the UHNS Trust responsible for Community Beds for their consideration and when I refer this to the Secretary of State for Health, I will enclose the petition.”

## Staffordshire outlines its policies on health and social care

The County Council has gone public about its policy on health and social care which poses a major challenge with an ageing population and funding pressures.

Council Leader Philip Atkins proposed:

“The council believes these principles (see below) should be at the heart of good health and care in Staffordshire. We will use our best endeavours to see that all involved in health services, public health, and social care work together to see them delivered in a seamless, inclusive and mutually supportive way with the necessary change and improvements to ensure that the Staffordshire health system is efficient and sustainable:



- Where possible it is everyone’s personal responsibility to keep themselves healthy. Where this is not possible due to disability, lack of appropriate mental capacity or some other reason beyond the individual’s control, it is the responsibility of local and central government to do everything possible to restore and keep that individual in good health
- Everyone has a right to expect quality, safe health and social care with consistent high standards regardless of background.
- Primary care services should be as close as possible to where residents live.
- Central and local government and governmental bodies, and health and care providers should ensure there is a strong emphasis on policies and procedures which provide structured early intervention concentrating on encouraging and preserving good health rather than treating illness.
- Residents should be able to go home as soon as treatment is completed and it is safe to discharge them, provided that an appropriate care plan and properly resourced aftercare is in place.

Elsewhere on the agenda and in response to an opposition question Cabinet Member for Health, Care and Wellbeing Alan White said the areas where sourcing home care is most challenging are Staffordshire Moorlands, Newcastle and Stafford districts. He added: “Additional capacity has been commissioned from the independent sector for these areas and is starting in December and January.”



### **A50 improvements will benefit the whole county**

Work has started on another important phase of the major project to improve the A50 which will benefit businesses and commuters across the county. This is probably the most important link between the East and West Midlands, and the improvements we’re making, on behalf of Highways England will make a huge difference in the area.



This next stage will see a new bridge built over the A50 to carry the A522, and when complete, will create a safer, more accessible network and keep traffic moving while bolstering the local economy. The junction will be closed for five days starting on 12

December while we carry out the work, and I’d like to thank anyone affected for their patience ahead of time.

I obviously know the area very well and know the project will relieve congestion and benefit businesses and their employees, making journeys quicker, easier and safer for everyone. But it will also support Staffordshire’s ongoing economic growth and the creation of new jobs and homes which is something we all want to see.

And staying with Uttoxeter the new recycling centre is open. The new £1.5 million recycling centre has been built on brownfield land off Dove Way, to replace the town’s previous permanent site at Pennycroft Lane with a real modern facility that offers everything needed to recycle and easily accessible for residents. Like all our centres, the site will accept the usual range of recyclable household waste, including cardboard, cooking oil, garden waste and electrical appliances. It will be open five days a week, closing on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

## Taking action to protect communities during quarrying

An independent inspector has approved plans to protect local communities and the environment during future quarrying in Staffordshire.



Over the next 15 years, the Minerals Local Plan shows how local communities and the environment will be protected and where sand, gravel and other minerals will come from. The plan, which was formed after a two-year consultation with local communities and the industry, will now go before a meeting of the full council in early 2017. If approved, the plan will be put in

place up to 2030.

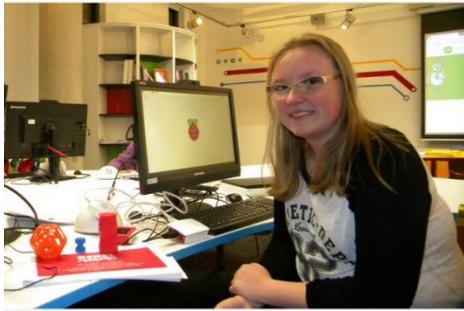
Materials for the construction sector, the building of everything from new houses and schools to roads, is supplied from the minerals industry, which helps the county's growing economy and the creation of jobs in the area.

Mark Winnington, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth at Staffordshire County Council, says: "This is an important plan which shows how we will protect our communities and countryside as we manage the extraction of sand, gravel and other natural resources to support the construction industry, our local economy and jobs. We've been working on the plan for the past two years and I would like to thank those individuals and organisations who took part in the various consultations to help us get it right.



"Having the plan is vital, without it, it would make it difficult to deal with planning applications for new quarries, and means there would be an effective free for all for the minerals industry to develop quarries anywhere across Staffordshire. Now that it has been approved by the Secretary of State we hope to present the report to full council for its approval early in the New Year."

## **Stafford teenager Cerys is European Digital Girl of the Year**



Stafford teenager Cerys Lock has been crowned European Digital Girl of the Year at an event in Brussels. The European Digital Girl of the Year title is part of the Ada Awards, which are named after 19<sup>th</sup> century computing pioneer Ada Lovelace. They recognise women and girls across Europe involved in digital studies and

careers. King Edward VI High School student Cerys Lock, aged 14, was nominated for the accolade to recognise her voluntary work with Stafford Library's weekly Code Club, which helps children get to grips with computer programming.

Gill Heath, Cabinet Member responsible for libraries at Staffordshire County Council, said: "Stafford Library has proved to be a real hit with people and we're delighted our activities and groups have become so popular with so many visitors. Our Code Club is a great example where we're using cutting edge computer programming technology to help teach children these modern day skills. It's thanks to our volunteers like Cerys who give up their time to pass on their knowledge and expertise."

## **Two new schools on One Site**

The new £7 million Ryecroft CE Middle School and Dove First CE (VC) School in Rocester has been officially opened. Since the beginning of the school year, staff and pupils at both schools have settled well into their new building, and have been taking full advantage of the wonderful facilities on



offer. It's quite a unique project with the new building allowing both schools to retain their individual identities but share expertise, costs and resources. And, when the time comes for pupils to move up from school to the other, they can do this seamlessly. A new pavement along Ashbourne Road, and a brand new Puffin Crossing and associated road markings, were also installed in time for the school start to help keep everyone safe.

As this report is the final one for 2016, I would like to take the opportunity to wish everyone reading this a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.