

News You Can Use on the Doorstep

Leader's Monthly E-Newsletter for March

From the Leader of the Council

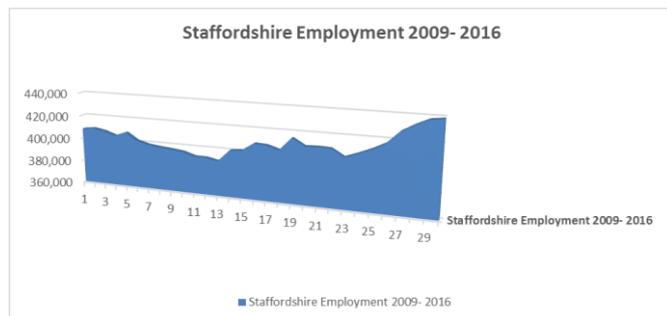


Prime Minister Theresa May taunted Jeremy Corbyn over the Copeland by-election disaster in February- saying it showed voters wanted 'strong and competent leadership'. Well she might having turned over a Labour majority of 2,000 into a Conservative victory of 2,000 or a gain of eight percentage points.

In bruising clashes in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister highlighted the devastating result that saw Labour lose the Cumbria seat for the first time in 80 years. The exchanges came minutes before victorious Tory candidate Trudy Harrison was formally introduced to the House.

In reality Staffordshire Conservatives have plenty to encourage them in the upcoming battle for control of County Buildings on May 4 and not just the Cumbria result—this incidentally extends a Conservative wall of seats from the North Sea to the Irish Sea in a new Hadrian's Wall.

First and foremost, we have helped more businesses stay and grow in Staffordshire since taking control from Labour in 2009. We now have record numbers of new businesses, which means more and better paid jobs. And as Staffordshire prepares for Brexit we are now in a strong position to take full advantage of new opportunities.



And as our economy grows, more pressure is put on our infrastructure. Staffordshire's roads are some of the safest in the country and our rapid jobs growth has been underpinned by investment in new highways. But we recognised that road defects and potholes matter to residents with an announcement soon of extra cash from 2017 to repair the roads that concern you most. Local people know their area best so we will provide a £250,000 fund for highways safety projects which communities can bid into.

Working for Everyone

We need a health service and care system that works for everyone. That's why we support our hospital and health providers to deliver high quality health services and remove waste and inefficiency. It is vital that we have access to well-resourced GPs and clinics in our communities to give us the best possible treatment close to where we live with hospitals having enough beds to treat emergency and critical patients.

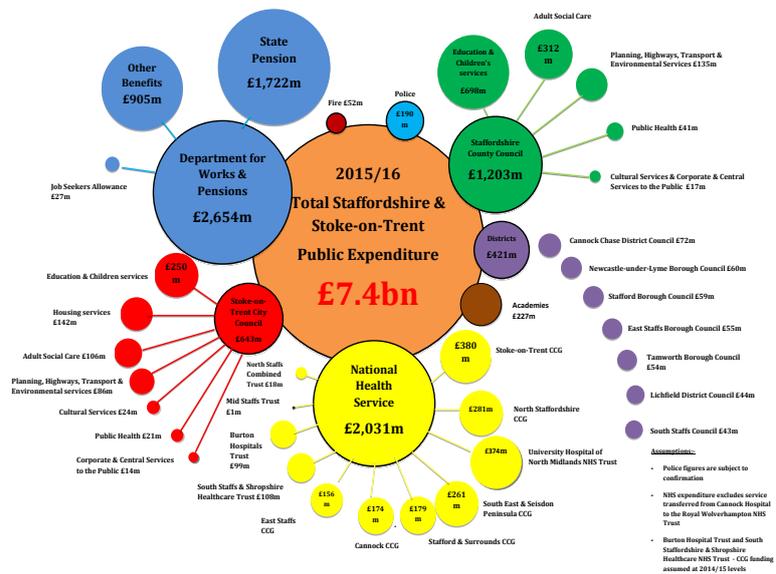


We believe that well-led nurseries, schools, colleges and training providers are best placed to give children the best start to prepare them and adults for a bright future. We will continue to challenge and help those providers who are not yet good or outstanding and offer parents and learners the information they need to choose the best academic or technical course for them.

Our aim is a well-run council with a low council tax as you know how best to spend your hard earned money wisely. Your Council Tax remains one of the lowest in England. We will keep your council efficient, with less waste and more modernised services working for you as simply and usefully as possible. We will continue to ensure the things that touch our everyday lives give value for money and satisfaction.

In this our public and private sector networks are key. The public sector in Staffordshire spends over £7 billion of public money every year. We need to make sure every pound counts. Staffordshire is now home to a growing ageing population with more people living well into their 80s and beyond.

Although this should be celebrated these improvements in life expectancy come with increasing shared costs and responsibilities. As a county council we need to be open about what this means, what we can do, and what residents can do for themselves.



Setting Council Tax for 2017-2018 at 4.95 per cent

The February Council meeting set the 2017-2018 Council Tax Band D at £1,142.54 which is an increase of 4.95 per cent when compared with 2016/17. The County Council approved a net revenue budget of £475.632 million and took a contribution of £7.804 million from general reserves. Leader of the Council Philip Atkins pointed out that opposition Labour councillors had voted against the Conservative budget but had proposed no alternative budget. “Even in opposition before 2009, the Conservatives always proposed an alternative budget,” he said.



The proposed budget would result in achieving a balanced budget for 2017/2018 in difficult financial circumstances. There remains a budget gap of £5.1 million in 2018/2019 with much larger gaps in future years, even with the additional Adult Social Care precept being assumed. However, the Strategic Plan and the MTFs (Medium Term Financial Strategy) will continue to be developed on the basis of an annual 1.95 per cent increase in Council Tax, plus a social care precept of 3 per cent in 2018/19, 0% in 2019/2010 and 2 per cent in future years. Additionally, there was additional one off funding provided in the form of an Adult Social Care Support Grant. This new grant has allocated £3.5 million in 2017/18 only to Staffordshire and has been funded nationally by the changes to the New Homes Bonus scheme. This additional funding is welcomed but is not enough to mitigate the large pressures arising from social care.

The Settlement clarified the potential increases to the social care precept. This precept can be increased up to a maximum of 3 per cent in any one year, but cannot exceed 6 per cent over the three years from 2017/2018 to 2019/20. The budget includes a “pressure” of £15 million because no income was received from the Better Care Fund for 2016/17 because CCGs have been told by NHS England to prioritise funding of increased hospital activity, and then to address their own budget deficits.

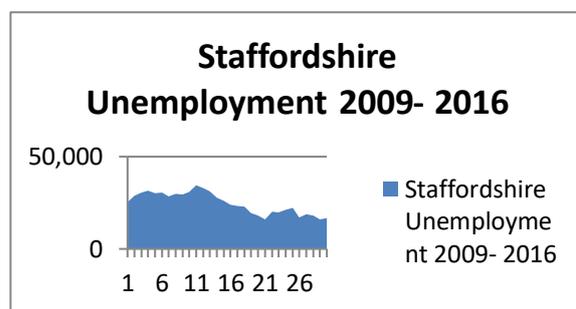
Outside these main issues, there are a number of budgetary pressures in other service portfolios. The cost of placements in Looked after Children is increasing and the level of waste tonnages is also rising. Taking all the pressures into account, this makes a total of £45.5 million in 2017/18.

Working with Residents to Find New Ways to Improve Lives

We have made a good start on the transformation of Staffordshire County Council to meet the needs of local people today and tomorrow. We are continuing to work with residents, voluntary groups, partners or the private sector to find new ways to improve lives. This includes inspiring more individuals and groups to play a greater role in improving their local areas. We are already seeing results in community libraries. Our approach is about listening, creating the right conditions for Staffordshire's people to flourish and allowing people to get on with creating their own prosperous future.

Statement of the Leader of the Council

In October 2016, the percentage of working age Job Seekers Allowance claimants in all Staffordshire at 0.9 per cent continued to be below both the West Midlands (2.3 per cent) and national rates (1.8 per cent). In August 2016, 86 per cent of all schools in Staffordshire were rated 'Good or Outstanding' by Ofsted compared to 88 per cent nationally.



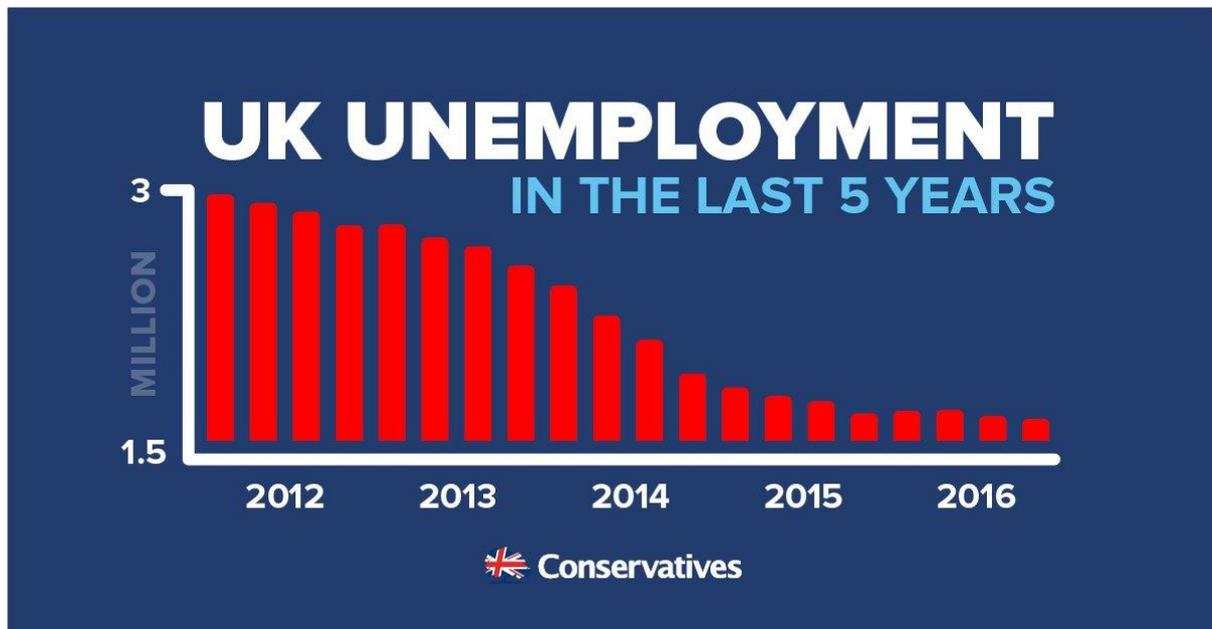
This was below the target of 90 per cent set for August 2016, however there has been an upward trend since August 2015. The revised target is for 92 per cent of Staffordshire's schools to be Good or Outstanding by August 2017.

In August 2016, there were 988 looked after children in Staffordshire. Of these 7.7 per cent (76) were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children compared to 4.2 per cent in August 2015.

The rate of crime and anti-social behaviour incidents both remained stable in October 2016 in Staffordshire compared with the previous 12 months. In October 2016 there was a rate of 5.27 recorded crimes per 1,000 population and a rate of 2.28 recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour per 1,000 population.



With one in four adults and one in five 10-year-olds now considered obese it is not surprising that tackling obesity is one of the two priorities for our public health team. Not only does obesity limit the chances of people in Staffordshire living a long, healthy life, it also costs Staffordshire's NHS and social care services over £100 million every year in dealing with the issues linked to it. With this in mind our Health and Wellbeing Board has launched a campaign called the Big Fat Chat aimed at starting a public debate about how we tackle the issue together.



Finally a Reminder of key dates for the County Council Election on May 4th.

All our Candidates have been selected and surveys are being delivered in key target areas to find our support and what concerns residents. Nominations have to be in by April 4th after the election is called in the last week of March. We will be delivering leaflets from April 6th on.

Postal Votes will be sent out on or before April 20th with the election itself held on May 4th. If you or anyone you know wants a Postal Vote please contact your local Association or district council who will be able to help.