

## News You Can Use on the Doorstep

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

#### From the Leader of the Council

##### Putting the Most Vulnerable in Staffordshire First

A record £310 million will be spent on care for the most vulnerable and frail in Staffordshire this year by Staffordshire County Council as it set a balanced budget for 2018-19 on February 15.



This had been identified as a top priority in the Conservative Manifesto for the county council election in May 2017 which returned the Conservatives with an increased majority.



As the county council moves to becoming self-financing, due to the loss of Government grants, Leader Philip Atkins affirms that the authority is also committed to growing Staffordshire's economy, supporting the creation of a more skilled workforce, and promoting the development of housing needs to make the council even more self-sufficient.

In a widely reported statement by the media and repeated at the most recent council meeting he said: "Next year will see us delivering record spending on care of the most vulnerable in our communities and still balance the books, which is a huge achievement at a time when financial pressures remain immensely challenging.

"Our economic programme has helped deliver a quarter of a billion pounds worth of investment in Staffordshire in under a decade. We are committed to building on this to give Staffordshire people greater opportunities to gain better paid, skilled jobs to support themselves and their families lead the most rewarding life possible.



“However, we recognise too that the growing financial pressures of care need to be tackled in terms of national funding but also by doing more to help each other and take steps now to live out our lives longer, healthier, and more independently where we can, so the county council can focus on those who really need our help.”

“Part of the wider proposals in the five-year plan for Staffordshire from 2018 and 2023 include:

- Investing a record £310 million this year on care of the elderly, people with learning disabilities, and looked after children in our care
- Spending an extra £5 million to tackle potholes in 2018/19
- Bidding to be part of the Government’s next round of business rates pilot, which could bring in an extra £10 million to the county council
- Rolling out the Smart Staffordshire programme – maximising the use of digital technology to benefit residents and businesses
- Encouraging a programme of housing development to support growth and investment in the county.

Mike Sutherland, Cabinet Member for Finance, adds:

“While nobody likes to pay more, Staffordshire still has the third lowest county council tax in the country, and there simply comes a time when we all have to do a little more and pay a little more to support those who depend on our help the most.



“Over the coming years we will help continue to reshape public services, encourage less demand on the public purse and will work with Government to address long-term funding issues for both social care and for supporting looked after children in the council’s care.”

### **Facing the challenge of social care delays in Staffordshire**

Staffordshire still faces a considerable challenge on reducing the number of delayed transfers of care that are attributable wholly or jointly to social care. The figures for November 2017 were higher than the national average, with Staffordshire having 1,452 delayed days (a rate of 239 delayed days per month per 100,000 population compared to the England average of 145 delayed days per 100,000 population). However, this was the third consecutive month that recorded a fall in social care delays which peaked at 277 days a month per 100,00 in August 2017. The latest position is in line with our Better Care Fund target trajectory agreed with NHS England.

## **Good news - more pothole repairs will boost the economy**

Helen Fisher Cabinet Support Member for Highways and Transport has repeated the administration's strongly held view that potholes need fixing as 'good roads are important to a successful and strong economy that creates jobs and generates wealth.'



She says: "Although our highways crews have been focusing on keeping us safely on the move after a chilly start to winter, they will soon be turning their attention to tackling potholes across the county, which of course are always more noticeable at this time of year due to the impact of the weather.

"Last year we invested an extra £5 million to tackle potholes alone and repaired 35,000 compared to 20,000 in a typical year.

"So, despite the financial challenges, I can confirm that we will once again be investing a further £5 million in this coming year and our highways teams will be out in force once again from the spring."

## **Looked after children pose budget pressures**



At the most recent council meeting Mark Sutton Cabinet Member for Children and Community Safety described looked after children as among the biggest pressures on the county council budget. In December 2017, there were 1,092 looked after children in Staffordshire which is a rate of 65 children per 10,000 population.

However, the year on year increase in Staffordshire is lower than the average across the West Midlands. In December 2017, 8 per cent of looked after children were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children compared to 8.9 per cent in December 2016.

The number of children subject of a child protection plan at the end of December 2017 increased to 683, which is a 13.3 per cent rise on the previous year end. The good news for children is that Staffordshire was one of the first places to offer 30 hours funded childcare and it has made a real difference to helping parents who want to work to cover some of the childcare costs.

The county council welcomed Families and Children’s Minister Nadhim Zahawi’s visit to the county to see for himself with Philip White, Cabinet Support for Lifelong Learning and Employability, the positive impact of the 30 hours’ childcare scheme.



The Minister said on a visit to Noah’s Ark Pre School in Stafford: “Staffordshire was one of the first implementers of our 30 hours childcare offer, and reached its initial targets well in advance, offering close to 500 places to three and four-year-olds in the area.

“We want to build on the thousands of families already accessing high-quality, affordable childcare, and Staffordshire is leading the way in helping us deliver on this goal.”

### **Nine out of 10 parents get first choice secondary schools**

Staffordshire parents had a welcome boost in March when nine out of 10 of them applying for secondary places received their first-choice school. Of the 7,494 applications made for



transfer at age 11, just over 92.5 per cent of parents were allocated their first preference school: with nearly 97 per cent getting one of their top three preferred schools. This is despite increased demand for secondary school places putting pressure on schools, while we are building new High Schools such as Branston Road, near Burton.

Educational standards in Staffordshire continue to rise. In 2017, 74.5 per cent of pupils achieved a good level of development at the Early Years Foundation Stage. That was an improvement compared to 2016 (73.8 per cent) and results were again ranked within the top quartile nationally. Staffordshire had the highest proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development of all its statistical neighbours.

## **Working with Staffordshire Uni for digital transformation**

Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire University will work together to explore a range of opportunities to support a thriving local economy and improve people's lives by making the most of the latest technology.



Schools are also set to benefit from the university's Microsoft Digital Skills programme, which aims to improve learning and knowledge of students and teachers as well as creating digital apprenticeships. The university is renowned for its digital expertise and aims to create thousands of apprenticeships over the next decade, embedding digital skills to support the needs of local business.

As part of extending the university's presence across Staffordshire, a hub for digital innovation will also be created in Stafford – supporting businesses and public service organisations in improvement.

Council Leader Philip Atkins says: "Staffordshire University is at the forefront of the digital age and this partnership will ensure that country residents and businesses fully benefit from its expertise and leadership. This partnership means we can explore cutting edge technology and think digital first wherever possible. Digital innovation will improve lives and productivity, leading to a healthier, happier, and more prosperous Staffordshire."

## **It's the countdown to Staffordshire Day!**

With just over a month to go to Staffordshire Day on 1 May, and more activities being added every day, the excitement is really starting to build.

This is our third Staffordshire Day and the extravaganza is set to take place over a week to give as many people as possible the chance to get involved. Events already organised include the Staffordshire Plate Raceday at Uttoxeter Racecourse, and a new exhibition dedicated to Newcastle-under-Lyme's Philip Astley, the Father of the Modern Circus.

As part of this year's celebrations Enjoy Staffordshire are also coordinating the World's Biggest Oatcake Morning. Similar to Macmillan's World's Biggest Coffee Morning, they are encouraging groups and charities to get involved and put on their own oatcake morning fundraisers. Many groups have already come forward, but we want as many oatcake mornings going on across the county as possible, so I'd urge you to get in touch with the team

Staffordshire Day is a wonderful opportunity to shout about our great county and we are keen to get everyone involved, so make sure the date, 1 May 2018 is in your diary. You can find out about events near you or advice on putting on your oatcake morning at [www.enjoystaffordshire.com/staffordshireday](http://www.enjoystaffordshire.com/staffordshireday)

### **Still time to volunteer for UK Corporate Games in Staffordshire**



If you love your sports and would like to join in the action at Europe's biggest sports event for business, then now's your chance.

Organisers of this year's UK Corporate Games which return to the county for the second time, from 21 to 24 June are now offering individuals and sports clubs the opportunity to be a volunteer.

It's a real coup getting the Games back for a second time and they give us a great opportunity to showcase the area's huge investment potential to top UK businesses. They are also expected to generate around £3 million for the local economy which is also good for many of our local businesses.

The games will see over 4,000 amateur athletes battling it out in 23 sports from cricket to tennis, and football to dragon boat racing. We also have over 1,000 employees from local Staffordshire companies taking part which is also great news.

Volunteers are needed for all the events and venues including Keele and Staffordshire Universities, Fenton Manor Sports Complex, Newcastle College, and Trentham Gardens. Your duties could include marshalling the events, meeting and greeting guests, and handing out refreshments. If you're interested, you can find out more at [www.corporate-games.com](http://www.corporate-games.com) or call 01733 380888.

## Showcasing Staffordshire's investment potential

Representatives from the County Council and our Local Enterprise Partnership attended a global property exhibition called MIPIM in Cannes, France. Here they had the opportunity to showcase and market the many investment opportunities available in the county including the M54 Wolverhampton – Staffordshire High Growth Zone to world-wide investors.

The Growth Zone which will be one of the biggest in the UK consists of six sites with new high-value manufacturing, business and logistics investment opportunities next to the M54 and junctions 10a and 12 of the M6. All the sites within the zone complement each other and are already home to world-leading brands which are playing an important part in UK and our own regional growth. The zone builds on the award-winning i54 South Staffordshire joint venture developed in 2012 which has already levered in millions of pounds of private investment.

Global events like MIPIM offer us a great opportunity to promote the huge investment potential in the area to the wider world, which will help to create thousands more quality jobs and ensure we have a skilled workforce to meet the needs of future business.



We have also welcomed the Chancellor's Spring Statement which promised to review public spending, revalue business rates and promote house building.

We are all aware that more homes still need to be built in the right places to meet the needs of our growing population and help young people put a first step on their property ladder, and I welcome moves that support that growth.

And at a time when we have fewer resources but are spending more money than ever before on helping the young, old and vulnerable, it is essential to review how local authorities are funded into the 2020s. This means we can continue to focus on delivering value for money for our residents and businesses, while continuing to support residents to help one another within their communities. It's also encouraging to hear there may be more investment in public services such as the NHS and we'll continue to work

closely with our partners to get the maximum from our combined budget in real outcomes.

Staffordshire has come a long way over the past eight years, taking a balanced approach as we build an economy that works for everyone with a focus on creating the right conditions for businesses to prosper and create more, better paid jobs for residents. Therefore, we have such low levels of unemployment in the county, which in turn should help us enjoy life and stay healthier and safe.

## Welcoming calls for stronger planning reform

Earlier this year, the Government pledged to re-write planning rules to help to speed up the building of more homes. Cutting red tape, using land more efficiently, fast track planning permissions, and putting local plans in place to give communities more control were all put forward.



We know that there is a national shortage of new homes. And while we welcome the government's proposals, which are a step in the right direction to speed things up and ensure people can own their own home, the reforms need to go further. In addition, county councils need to be given a greater role in creating the right conditions necessary to make it happen.

Like larger cities, we need to be able to take a more strategic overview to make sure the necessary infrastructure such as roads, surgeries and schools required for housing development are in place and funded in a more synchronised manner. The urgent delivery of more homes can be delivered by working ever more closely with our district and borough partners, who are responsible for planning control and ourselves as the county-wide lead for infrastructure.

I'll continue to champion for change to speed up house-building, and in my role as Vice Chairman of the County Council Networks and their national spokesman on planning, housing and infrastructure, I will continue to lobby the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Sajid Javid to make the changes.

And Finally -



## STAFFORDSHIRE DAY UPDATE

