

Councillor Andy Cooper (Mayor)

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

K M Aspin	A M Loughran
J A Barron	A R McNaughton
F Beatty	D M McNaughton
E L Carter	A Nixon
R P Cooke	L Nixon
B M Cross	G P K Pardesi
M G Dodson	A N Pearce
A P Edgeller	J M Pert
P C Edgeller	J S Powell
A T A Godfrey	J P Read
A D Hobbs	A F Reid
J Hood	J T Rose
F D J James	D P Rouxel
R A James	A J Sandiford
E G R Jones	S N Spencer
P W Jones	J Thorley
R Kenney	M J Winnington
P A Leason	

Officers in attendance:-

T Clegg	-	Chief Executive
I Curran	-	Head of Law and Governance
W Conaghan	-	Press and Communication Manager
J Dean	-	Democratic Services Officer

C15 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2023 were agreed as a true and correct record.

C16 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors I D Fordham, B McKeown, J A Nixon and M Phillips.

C17 Declarations of Interest

Councillors A P Edgeller and J M Pert declared a personal interest in respect of agenda Item No 8 - Health Scrutiny: Joint Working Arrangements.

C18 Announcements

The Mayor detailed the following forthcoming events for Members to note:

- Izaak Walton Birthday Commemoration Church Service to be held at St Mary's Church at 10.00am on Sunday 6 August 2023;
- Battle of Britain Commemoration Church Service to be held on Sunday 17 September 2023

C19 Public Question Time

The following questions had been received in pursuant of paragraph 11.1 of the Council Procedure Rules:-

(a) Mrs K Farrington

Question 1

“Does the Cabinet Member agree that settlement boundaries (RDBs) are a vital part of village development and strategy and if not, why not”?

Councillor A F Reid provided the following response:-

“There is provision under Law for the Local Plan to be reviewed from time to time, and I undertake to consult with local residents and relevant Parish Council's before any final decisions be taken relating to this matter”.

Mrs Farrington declined the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

Question 2

“Does the Cabinet Member agree that RDBs, given that they have been voted upon and supported by local residents in a local referendum, should be preserved as to their existing boundaries”?

Councillor A F Reid provided the following response:-

“I refer you to my previous answer which I believe answers the question”.

Mrs Farrington declined the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

(b) Mr P Farrington

Question 1

“Will the Cabinet Member agree to exclude from the preferred option sites in Gnosall and Woodseaves Ward those areas outside the RDB boundaries to preserve the sanctity of existing greenfield sites in and around local villages in the Gnosall and Woodseaves Ward?”

Councillor A F Reid provided the following response:-

“I reiterate that there is provision under Law for the Local Plan to be reviewed from time to time, and I undertake to consult with local residents and relevant Parish Council’s before any final decisions be taken relating to this matter; it is morally right that the Council does this”.

Mr Farrington asked the following supplementary question:-

“Will the Cabinet Member be more specific?”

Councillor A F Reid provided the following response:-

“Law states that said reviews must be held, taking into account the views of local people; the previous administration chose not to do this”.

Question 2

“As to existing RDBs in Gnosall and Woodseaves Ward, does the Cabinet Member agree that there is a moral and legal obligation upon him and the Council to preserve the RDBs as they are and if not, can he explain why he so disagrees?”

Councillor A F Reid provided the following response:-

“The Council was under a moral obligation to review the Local Plan, subject to the balance of law”.

Mr Farrington declined the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

C20 Councillor Session

(a) Councillor J M Pert had submitted the following question in accordance with Paragraph 12.3(a) of the Council Procedure Rules:-

“Maintaining Council budget prudence during a time of a cost of living crisis has to be a priority for this Council, as much as it is a reality for many of the residents of Stafford Borough.

Given the appointment of an additional Cabinet Member, which is unbudgeted, where are the budget cuts going to come from to pay for 2 the additional increase in Councillor’s Special Responsibility allowances, given that the budget is set for the year?

And what exactly are the residents of Stafford Borough going to get from this post - which has a portfolio responsibility that is a fraction of other Cabinet Members - to ensure that this is real value for money?

Why was the Council not given the courtesy of an open discussion prior to the creation of this partial Cabinet role, as then the value for money could have been identified up front and in the public gaze rather than by the Conservative opposition shining a public light on this lack of accountability and funding?”

Councillor A T A Godfrey, Leader of the Council, responded as follows:

“During canvassing for the 2023 elections, regeneration of Stafford town centre was recognised as a key priority for residents of the Borough and as such, the Deputy Leader of the Council was tasked with leading on this project;

As per the constitution, the Leader of the Council can appoint between 2 and 9 Councillors to Cabinet. The current structure has 7, which is compliant with the constitution. There is sufficient budget within the cost centre to fund the proposed number of Members with it being from a combination of base budget and underspends from other cost centre headings. This has been checked by the Head of Finance and is deemed appropriate”.

Councillor Pert asked the following supplementary question:-

“Will this Cabinet post be re-visited upon completion of the regeneration of Stafford Town Centre”?

Councillor Godfrey reported that completion of the Market Square works did not constitute the end of efforts to regenerate Stafford town centre and that Councillor Kenney’s role also included providing cover for Cabinet colleagues, when required.

(b) Councillor F Beatty had submitted the following question in accordance with Paragraph 12.3(a) of the Council Procedure Rules:-

“Given the decision three weeks ago by the Planning Inspectorate to grant planning permission to allow Serco to convert the former University accommodation at Beaconside into housing for asylum seekers and the Borough Council’s Leader’s statement on Wednesday 12 July to effectively rule out a Judicial Review purely based on legal advice about the cost of failure.

Will the Leader publish the legal advice in full and also indicate what weight was given in this decision to other elements, like the impact on residents of the Borough, the impact on local services like the health service and whether this location is indeed an appropriate location, particularly given what Stafford Borough is already doing elsewhere to house those seeking asylum and the volumes to be housed in one concentrated location.

Launching a Judicial Review would at least delay the arrival of asylum seekers and show government very clearly how Stafford Borough feel

about these proposals and give them time to review whether it is indeed an appropriate location, something that the local Member of Parliament, Mrs. Theo Clarke, has also been calling for.

Will the Leader publish this advice for transparency purposes and act on local residents concerns?”

Councillor A T A Godfrey, Leader of the Council, responded as follows:

“The full legal opinion received has been published on the Council’s website. The advice received on seeking said judicial review made clear that the Council would not be successful, and there would be a significant associated cost for Council Tax payers to bear, in addition to the £50k already incurred in respect of this matter”.

Councillor Beatty asked the following supplementary question:-

“I ask the Leader of the Council that in ruling out the undertaking of a Judicial Review what thought had been given in addressing the costs of continuing to care for vulnerable residents of the Borough, the numbers of which would be added to when individuals achieve refugee status”?

Councillor Godfrey reiterated the Councils resolve to intensely lobby Central Government for additional funding to tackle said matters.

Councillor J M Pert asked the following supplementary question:-

“The Leader referred to a second legal opinion when addressing the matter of not instigating a Judicial Review - would he confirm from who such an opinion was received”?

Councillor Godfrey confirmed that he was referring to the Council’s Legal Services Department.

C21 Notice of Motion

A Notice of Motion pursuant to Paragraph 13 of the Council Procedure Rules had been proposed by Councillors J M Pert and M J Winnington as follows:-

“Councillors who have been elected to serve on outside bodies on behalf of this Council and their fellow Councillors and residents have been given an enormous honour - that they should treat with high regard and serve with diligence and professionalism in recognition of the importance of these outside bodies.

Stafford Borough Council resolves that :-

1. Where attendance at the meetings of these outside bodies falls below acceptable levels of 80% attendance at meetings over any given six month period, that the representative will forfeit their appointment in

favour of one of the alternative Members nominated at the Annual Appointments meeting of the Council, so that they may undertake their role in the manner required and treat the partner organisation with the due respect deserved;

2. That an Annual Report from all Outside Body appointments is made at the Annual Appointments meeting of the Council on the prior year's activities to demonstrate the worthiness of representatives to be nominated to serve the Council and the residents of the Borough in this way. Where attendance at meetings has been less than 80% or no report is presented, then that representative will be barred from standing in forthcoming years of that administration as a Council nominated representative”.

Members discussed the Motion as provided by paragraph 15 of the Council Procedure Rules.

Members subsequently voted on the Motion as set out above which was declared to be lost.

C22 Health Scrutiny Committee: Joint Working Arrangements

Considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance (**V3** 23/06/23).

Councillor J Hood introduced the report, noting the detail as contained within paragraph 5, and concluded her comments by moving the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor R A James and on being put to the vote was unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:- that

- (a) the revised Code of Joint Working Arrangements with District and Borough Councils for Health Scrutiny (attached as an appendix to the report) (“the Joint Code”) be adopted;
- (b) the Constitution be amended to refer to the Joint Code, and its provisions (as set out in paragraph 5.5 of the report).

C23 Committee Business Planning Reports

Considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance (**V1** 07/07/23).

Councillor M J Winnington introduced the Resources Scrutiny Committee Business Planning report and thanked Members and Officers for their help and support in the work of the Committee. In conclusion, Councillor Winnington moved that the report be received.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor R A James.

Members then voted on the proposal as set out, which was declared to be unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:- that

- (a) the annual report of the Resources Scrutiny Committee be received.

Continuing, Councillor F Beatty introduced the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee Business Planning and thanked Members and Officers for their help and support in the work of the Committee. In conclusion, Councillor Beatty moved that the report be received.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor J T Rose.

Members then voted on the proposal as set out, which was declared to be unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:- that

- (b) the annual report of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee be received.

Finally, Councillor A P Edgeller introduced the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Business Planning report and thanked Members and Officers for their help and support in the work of the Committee. In conclusion, Councillor Edgeller moved that the report be received.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor R P Cooke.

Members then voted on the proposal as set out, which was declared to be unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:- that

- (c) the annual report of the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee be received

MAYOR