

Councillor Andy Cooper (Mayor)

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

Councillors:

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

Officers in attendance:-

T Clegg	-	Chief Executive
C Forrester	-	Deputy Chief Executive (Resources)
I Curran	-	Head of Law and Governance
W Conaghan	-	Press and Communication Manager
J Dean	-	Democratic Services Officer

**C31 Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 September 2023 were agreed as a true and correct record.

**C32 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J A Barron and B M Cross.

### **C33 Announcements**

The Mayor thanked those Members who supported the Mayor's Charity Appeal, Ladies Luncheon held at the Riverbank Restaurant, Stafford which had raised just over £450;

The Mayor thanked Members who took part in the Ceilidh held at Great Haywood Memorial Hall which had raised over £600;

Members were reminded of the Abba Tribute Evening to be held at the Top of the World, Stafford on Friday 1 March 2024 and were encouraged to contact the Mayor's Office for tickets should they wish to attend;

Following a successful visit to East Staffordshire Borough Council, the Mayor was seeking to hold an evening with Elizabeth I at the Civic Centre, Stafford.

It was with sadness that the Mayor announced the passing of former Alderman Christine Baron. All present observed a minutes silence to pay their respects.

Councillors Pert, Godfrey and A P Edgeller subsequently paid their own personal tributes to former Councillor Baron.

### **C34 Presentation of Petition**

Councillor M J Winnington submitted a petition on behalf of residents of Sutton seeking the Council to take action in respect of the Red Lion public house.

The petition was presented to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Planning.

### **C35 Public Question Time**

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

(a) Alderman Patrick Farrington

Referring to the purchase of the old Co-op building and the refurbishment of the Market Square in Stafford, what role have you personally performed in the strategy, planning, design, delivery and execution of these two significant developments in the Borough?

Councillor R Kenney provided the following response:-

"Members of the Council set its policies, which are duly delivered by its Officers - this administration is based on teamwork. I spend many hours working closely with Officers which has led to the improvements to the Market Square and other projects being delivered on time. We are now 6 months into the Council's new

administration, which should be applauded for what it has already delivered.”

Alderman Farrington asked the following supplementary question:-

“Was Councillor Kenney aware that Market Square, Stafford reopened on the day the Labour Group claimed responsibility for delivering the scheme?”

Councillor R Kenney provided the following response:-

“This administration has delivered much over 6 months, not 20 years. I am pleased to personally announce negotiations to purchase the Guildhall shopping centre, Stafford have commenced. This administration is serious about redevelopment of the Borough’s town centres, and is increasing the pace of delivering major improvements through its close working relationships with Officers”.

(b) Alderman Patrick Farrington

Referring to the exciting leisure and play developments at Westbridge Park Stone, what role have you personally performed in the strategy, planning, design, delivery and execution of this significant development in the Borough?

Councillor G P K Pardesi provided the following response:-

“Thank you for the question. I have personally played a role by meeting with Officers, visiting the park 6 times, responding to questions from residents and keeping Officers informed of any feedback. It would be an insult to Officers for me to micromanage the project. I have played a full and appropriate role as the Cabinet Member for Leisure in delivering this and other sites; the question is phrased to cast doubt on my abilities - it is not my job to be an expert in this field - what matters is that the public chose to elect me to represent them”.

Alderman Farrington asked the following supplementary question:-

“Was the Councillor aware that the improvements to Rowley Park were delivered under the previous administration?”

Councillor G P K Pardesi provided the following response:-

“Irrespective who did or didn’t facilitate the improvements the park was in an absolute disgraceful state”.

## C36 Councillor Session

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

“Can the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration confirm that he is working to the previously published timescales for the next stages of the Local Plan - and if not, why have the new timescales not been approved by Cabinet and formally released so that everyone in our communities has the same information”?

Councillor A F Reid, Cabinet Member, Economic Development and Planning Portfolio, responded as follows:

“I share the Councillor’s frustration and believe that, were our positions swapped, I might well be asking Councillor Beatty the same question at the same time, and getting the same answer that I am about to provide.

Following the preferred options consultation on the Local Plan 2020-2040 the Government has published a number of proposals signalling significant changes to the planning system, including the process and content of Local Plans. Last month the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 paved the way for secondary legislation and national planning policy to provide more details. As a result, the Local Plan timescales, as set out in the Local Development Scheme published in October 2022, will be updated in the New Year to take account of the most up-to-date evidence based information and ensure future steps reflect the latest National Planning Policy Framework and guidance.

There is no new timetable at this time, neither formal nor informal.

I note and welcome the fact that as Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Committee Councillor Beatty has agreed to add the Local Plan as a discussion item to the next meeting agenda. I look forward to engaging with the Committee at that time, and believe that a discussion in that forum will be good for everyone involved.”

Councillor Beatty asked the following supplementary question:-

“I don’t disagree. How will the Administration deal with said delays in the context of the New Local Plan Legislation? Start again?”

Councillor Reid responded as follows:

“There is currently no proposed timescale, I am hoping this will be in the New Year”.

Councillor J M Pert asked the following supplementary question:

“Could the Cabinet Member clarify when in the New Year?”

Councillor Reid responded as follows:

“I am hoping this matter can be discussed at the next meeting of the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee”.

Councillor A P Edgeller asked the following supplementary question:

“The Leader and Cabinet Member have met with Parish Council’s in the Borough where development is taking place, what about the others?”

Councillor Read responded as follows:

“I am looking to meet with associated Community Groups and will continue to concentrate on those areas identified in the preferred options consultation”.

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

“Can the Cabinet Member for Climate Change confirm the level of investment and budget in the next municipal year he will have, given the importance of climate change to current and future generations of Stafford Borough residents?”

Councillor A N Pearce, Cabinet Member, Climate Change Portfolio, responded as follows:

“I welcome the Councillor’s question, with a sense of déjà vu, as I asked similar question at the Council meeting in February 2022. The Motion was referred to Cabinet but was never discussed or referred back to Council. Under the current budget there is no provision, however this will be addressed in the emerging 2023/24 budget”

Councillor Winnington asked the following supplementary question:

“Can the Cabinet Member assure us that there will be no diversion of funds regarding biodiversity net gain?”

Councillor Pearce responded as follows:

“The presentation to Council prior to this meeting made the situation clear; it is not possible to divert such funding - the answer is no”.

- (c) Councillor A P Edgeller had submitted the following question in accordance with Paragraph 12.3(a) of the Council Procedure Rules:-

“In the years of the previous administrations, there had always been a principal of supporting local democracy and involving locally elected Members in decisions that affect principally their electoral wards, so that there is a direct link to those people who elected them.

Can the Leader of the Council confirm his preferred way of working in respect of decisions involving Members' electoral wards"?

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

"I am grateful for the question, we should all be working together across the Borough".

Councillor A P Edgeller asked the following supplementary question:

"What are the plans for moving the development in Yelverton Park forward?"

Councillor Godfrey responded as follows:

"Funding for the area was across two Borough Wards, there was no consultation conducted by the previous administration hence the decision was taken to delay implementation until the full facts are known".

Councillor P W Jones asked the following supplementary question:

"When will consultation with Local Members on developments in their Wards commence?"

Councillor Godfrey responded as follows:

"Consultation already takes place; please get in touch with myself, the relevant Cabinet Member or Officer should you require further information".

Councillor M Phillips asked the following supplementary question:-

"Is the Leader of the Council willing to attend a public meeting in my Ward to discuss the decision reached relating to the previously mentioned proposal deferred by Cabinet?"

Councillor Godfrey responded as follows:

"Yes, please send me the details".

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

"Can the Cabinet Member for Community and Health confirm their policy in terms of working with the voluntary sector across the Borough going forwards, and how they intend to support the massive work that the voluntary sector does in all communities within Stafford Borough"?

Councillor J Hood, Cabinet Member, Community Portfolio, responded as follows:

“Thank you for the question; Government cuts have led to unprecedented demand on the voluntary sector, and the Council will continue to do its best to support said challenges and will always listen to and respect the needs of its partner organisations. This administration takes its responsibilities seriously in this matter”

Councillor Pert asked the following supplementary question:

“I welcome the answer and would like to pay tribute to the work of the voluntary sector in the Borough; my question is will financial support through the small grants scheme continue?”

Councillor Hood responded as follows:

“The matter is under consideration and will be reported to Members when a conclusion is reached”

### **C37 Notice of Motion**

A Notice of Motion pursuant to Paragraph 13 of the Council Procedure Rules had been proposed by Councillors J T Rose and D P Rouxel as follows:

Protecting our rivers and oceans

This Council notes:

- No matter where we live in the UK, we are never more than 70 miles from the ocean. We all benefit from our ocean through the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the way our ocean regulates the climate. We all impact our ocean not only if we visit the coast but every day through our consumer choices, what we put down the drain, the litter and pollution that flows into our rivers, and the carbon emissions we produce. Our local stream or river is our direct link to the ocean. The evidence is clear that our ocean is in a state of emergency and that this impacts us all, no matter where we live. The burden of taking care of our ocean falls to communities at the coast; but they are at the end of the line, receiving pollution and problems from inland communities. Inland councils have an essential role to play in recovering the health of our ocean through increasing awareness of how local actions can affect the ocean and by acting as responsible custodians of the rivers, streams and waterways that run through their area on their way to the sea.

- The River Trent starts and passes through much of Staffordshire, making its way through Nottingham before joining the Humber Estuary and entering the North Sea. This river is our direct link to the ocean and has sustained Staffordshire's population for centuries. The River Trent and its wetlands, provide habitation for many species of bird, fish, insects but also otters and other mammals .
- The River Sow also provides much habitation for species and passes through the heart of our town and Victoria Park. The River Penk joins the River Sow by Baswich, before both joining the River Trent by Shugborough Estate. The Environment Agency has a responsibility to care for the River Trent and its tributaries, for residents of Stafford Borough and communities across the UK that are downstream of us. The Borough Council must press Government to ensure that the Environment Agency is properly funded to fulfil its duties and that the Agency takes all reasonable steps to do so.
- Local residents are concerned regarding the health of our local rivers due to regular wastewater discharge, which includes untreated sewage. This has dire consequences both for human health and wildlife, damaging biodiversity .
- Only 14% of rivers nationally can be classified as in 'good' ecological status.
- The Government is weakening environmental protections and monitoring of English rivers.
- Seven Trent Water is currently described as a 'industry leading company' whilst having 204 pollution incidents in 2021 . Seven Trent Water has already been fined £1.5 million for illegal sewage discharges in Worcestershire and £800,000 for discharging 3.8 million litres of raw sewage in Shropshire . The Water Regulator, Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency must ensure protections are put in place to protect Rivers.
- Whilst there are long term commitments, there are no plans in place which will address the immediate unacceptable situation either locally by Seven Trent or by national government.

The Council therefore resolves to:

- 1 Recognise this Council's role in helping to protect its rivers and seas, including from the cumulative impacts of pollution, in line with its local planning policy, and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2 Recognise that there is clear evidence of deterioration of water quality due to cumulative impact of multiple sewage discharge events or 'sewage overload'.



- 3 Seek to better understand the cumulative impact of wastewater discharge including untreated sewage on the Borough's rivers, wildlife and the health of its residents.
- 4 Take a lead on addressing this issue, working constructively with other agencies.
- 5 Ensure the evidence base being compiled for the new local plan fully assesses the cumulative impact of sewage discharge so that this is factored into decisions made in the new local plan, including the overall level of future development.
- 6 Fully incorporate JBA consulting's recommendation for 1.) Early engagement with water companies as part of the planning process. 2.) That more detailed water quality modelling is carried out in a Phase 2 Outline study to assess the cumulative impact of growth across the whole study area on the Water Framework Directive classification of the receiving waterbodies in order to ensure that the environmental capacity of the catchment is not a constraint to growth. 3.) Further study of the wastewater network is also recommended once greater certainty over which sites will be brought forward for development.<sup>i</sup> As set out in *Southern Staffordshire Councils Water Cycle Study – Phase 1 Scoping Report*.
- 7 To work with Seven Trent to aim for water neutrality defined by the Government and the Environment Agency as "For every development, total water use in the wider area after the development must be equal to or less than total water use in the wider area before development". Achieved by reducing leakage from the water supply networks; making new developments more water-efficient; "offsetting" new demand by retrofitting existing homes with water-efficient devices; encouraging existing commercial premises to use less water; implementing metering and tariffs to encourage the wise use of water' education and awareness-raising amongst individuals.
- 8 Write to the Environment Agency asking it to issue a position statement in relation to Stafford Borough, which sets out its understanding of the cumulative impact of 200+ sewage discharge on our rivers, or if it is not willing to do, the reasons why.
- 9 Ask Natural England for an ecological assessment of the River Trent and its tributaries.
- 10 Invite the Chief Executive of Seven Trent plus senior representatives from the Environment Agency and Natural England to attend a Stafford Borough Council Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny meeting to answer questions on the current levels of sewage discharge, the ecological health of our rivers, and their plans moving forward.

- 11 Ask Seven Trent Water, from this date onwards, in its planning consultation responses for major development, to clarify which treatment works will be managing the sewage; and whether it has the information available to assess the impact on the number or duration of sewage discharges into local rivers, and if it does have this information to share it (noting that this can only be requested not required).
- 12 Request that Borough Council planning officers, from now onwards, include in all reports relating to major development a specific section on the provision of adequate arrangements for the disposal of foul sewage trade effluent and surface water as set out in Policy N2 of the local plan under sustainable drainage, and the impact on watercourses, including the potential for the development to affect sewage outflow into watercourses (i.e. cumulative impact), or to flag if this information is not fully available, so that this information (or the lack of it) is clearly and transparently set out.
- 13 Embed protection and recovery of the Sow, Penk and Trent in all strategic decisions, plans, budgets, procurement and approaches to decisions by the Council (particularly in planning, regeneration, waste, skills and economic policy), aligning with climate change mitigation and adaptation requirements, and considering nature-based solutions in our journey towards a carbon neutral and climate resilient future.
- 14 Ensure that the Council's Climate Change and Biodiversity Plan support ocean recovery through a focus on the protection and recovery of the Sow, Penk and Trent, and the implementation of nature-based solutions.
- 15 Work with partners locally and nationally to deliver improved water quality and increased sustainability, including other Staffordshire district Councils, the Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Sustainability Board, Staffordshire Nature Recovery Strategy Board, other local community groups, clubs and other organisations that have a recreational, economic or other interest in its protection and recovery.
- 16 Use the Council website and other communication channels to update on the Sow, Penk and Trent recovery progress, and signpost to opportunities and guidance that enable residents to become more ocean literate and to get involved with river and marine citizenship activities.
- 17 Recognising that wherever we live we share responsibility for good marine management, we will write to the Government asking them to put the ocean into net recovery by 2030 by:

- (a) Ensuring Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities have the resources they need to effectively research and monitor our growing number of marine protected areas, and to set and enforce appropriate fishing levels that support local economies and deliver environmental sustainability.
- (b) Working with coastal, estuarine and maritime communities to co-develop marine policy to ensure it delivers equitable and sustainable outcomes in local placemaking.
- (c) Appointing a dedicated Minister for the Coast.
- (d) Embedding ocean and civic literacy into the national curriculum.
- (e) Stopping plastic pollution at source by strengthening the regulations around single-use plastics and set standards for microfibre-catching filters to ensure that all new domestic and commercial washing machines are fitted with a filter that captures a high percentage of microfibres produced in the wash cycle and support the solutions needed to address the threat posed by historic coastal landfill sites.
- (f) Improving the water quality of our rivers, estuarine and coastal waters leading to the ocean to benefit nature and the health and wellbeing of all UK residents, including by stopping the regular pollution of our rivers and seas.
- (g) And by listening to marine and social scientific advice to update the Marine Policy Statement and produce a national Ocean Recovery Strategy which will:
  - (i) Enable the recovery of marine ecosystems rather than managing degraded or altered habitats in their reduced state.
  - (ii) Consider levelling up, marine conservation, energy, industrial growth, flood and coastal erosion risk management, climate adaptation and fisheries policy holistically rather than as competing interests.
  - (iii) Develop a smarter approach to managing the health of the entire ocean that moves beyond Marine Protected Areas and enables links to be made across sectors towards sustainability.
  - (iv) Establish improved processes for understanding the benefits of ocean recovery, leaving no doubt the links between this and human lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing.

- 18 Report to Full Council within [12] months on the actions and projects that will contribute to the recovery of the Sow, Penk and Trent and their tributaries and the nature and wildlife that they support within Stafford Borough.

i <https://www.worldatlas.com/rivers/river-trent.html>

ii <https://www.sas.org.uk/water-quality/water-quality-facts-and-figures/the-risks-of-mixing-with-sewage/> and <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/8460/documents/88412/default/> (pages 23-25)

iii <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2021/november/the-deadly-effects-of-sewage-pollution-on-nature.html>

iv <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/6730f10b64184200b171a57750890643?item=1>

v <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9850/#:~:text=In%20August%202023%2C%20the%20government,of%20Lords%20in%20September%202023.>

vi <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/27/england-to-diverge-from-eu-water-monitoring-standards>

vii <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-and-sewerage-companies-in-england-environmental-performance-report-2021/severn-trent-water-epa-data-report-2021>

viii <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/08/severn-water-fined-15m-for-sewage-discharges>

ix <https://www.stwater.co.uk/about-us/our-plans-2025-2030/>

x <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/09/18/latest-water-classifications-results-published/>

xi <https://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/evidence-base-southern-staffordshire-water-cycle-study-february-2020> (page vii)

RESOLVED:- that the matter be referred to Cabinet without discussion.

### **C38 Fees and Charges Review 2024**

Considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) (V2 23/10/23).

Councillor R P Cooke introduced the report by detailing the content of Paragraphs 5, noting that the general increase of 6% was less than the current rate of inflation.

Continuing, Councillor Cooke was pleased to announce freezes to the following charges:-

- Land charges have remained the same due to impending system change ahead of migration to Land registry;
- Street Trading - A500 road site;
- Bereavement - sound recording of service onto CD and use of screen for display of photographs / videos throughout the service;
- Market fees, due to the current trading environment

Continuing, the Portfolio holder stated that the Cabinet were mindful of the suggested increases which were modes before concluding his comments by recommending that the proposal as set out in Paragraph 2 be approved.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor A T A Godfrey.

During the ensuing discussion, the following amendment was proposed by Councillor M G Dodson, seconded by Councillor J M Pert:-

“The Council’s income is in such rude health there is no requirement to increase fees and charges, and free parking should be provided in Stafford and Stone after 12pm for 10 days leading up to Christmas. The Council is achieving a 5% return on its investments equating to £4M against a budget of £20M - therefore there is no need to increase fees and charges”.

Members of the Council then discussed the amendment to the report as provided by paragraph 15 of the Council Procedure Rules.

At the conclusion of the debate and in accordance with Paragraph 17.4(a) of the Council Procedure Rules a recorded vote was taken; voting on the amendment was as follows:-

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
K M Aspin	E L Carter	A G Cooper
F E Beatty	R P Cooke	L Nixon
M G Dodson	I D Fordham	
A P Edgeller	A T A Godfrey	
P C Edgeller	A D Hobbs	
R A James	J Hood	
E G R Jones	F D J James	
P W Jones	R Kenney	
J A Nixon	P A Leason	
J M Pert	A M Loughran	
M Phillips	B McKeown	
A J Sandiford	A R McNaughton	
M J Winnington	D M McNaughton	
	A Nixon	
	G P K Pardesi	
	A N Pearce	
	J P Powell	
	J P Read	
	A F Reid	
	J T Rose	
	D P Rouxel	
	S N Spencer	
	J Thorley	

The Mayor declared that the amendment was lost.

Members of the Council then considered the original proposal as provided for in the Council Procedure Rules.

In accordance with Paragraph 17.4(a) of the Council Procedure Rules a recorded vote was taken; voting on the proposal was as follows:-

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>
E L Carter	K M Aspin	A G Cooper
R P Cooke	F E Beatty	
I D Fordham	M G Dodson	
A T A Godfrey	A P Edgeller	
A D Hobbs	P C Edgeller	
J Hood	R A James	
F D J James	E G R Jones	
R Kenney	P W Jones	
P A Leason	J A Nixon	
A M Loughran	J M Pert	
B McKeown	M Phillips	
A R McNaughton	A J Sandiford	
D M McNaughton	M J Winnington	
A Nixon		
L Nixon		
G P K Pardesi		
A N Pearce		
J S Powell		
J P Read		
A F Reid		
J T Rose		
D P Rouxel		
S N Spencer		
J Thorley		

The Mayor declared that the proposal was duly carried.

RESOLVED:- that the proposed Fees and Charges for 2024 be approved, specifically the new charges as set out in paragraph 5.9 of the report and the increases above 9% in paragraph 5.11.

### **C39 The Designation of Polling Districts and Places 2023**

Considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance (V1 09/11/23).

Councillor R P Cooke introduced the report, noting the detail as contained within paragraph 5, and concluded his comments by moving the recommendation as set out in paragraph 2.

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

RESOLVED:- that:

- (a) the proposals made as part of the review as detailed in appendix 1 of the report be approved;
- (b) the polling districts and places that remained unchanged be designated as detailed in appendix 2 of the report.

Councillor J M Pert paid tribute to the Officers of the Elections Team for their efforts in preparing the report.

**C40 Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2023/24**

Considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) (V1 02/11/23).

Councillor R P Cooke introduced the report, noting the detail as contained within paragraph 5, and concluded his comments by moving the recommendation as set out in paragraph 2.

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

RESOLVED:- that the report, the treasury activity and the Prudential Indicators for 2023/24 be noted.

The Leader of the Council gave his thanks to Officers of the Investments Team for their work in managing the Council's investment portfolio.

**C41 Review of the Constitution**

Considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance (V1 08/11/23).

Councillor R P Cooke introduced the report, noting the detail as contained within paragraph 5, and concluded his comments by moving the recommendation as set out in paragraph 2.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor J M Pert and on being put to the vote was unanimously carried.

RESOLVED:- that the Constitution be updated to align with the senior management structure, and to provide delegated authorities to the Deputy Chief Executives, as detailed in the appendix to the report.

MAYOR

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