

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

SEPTEMBER 2019

In line with the Council's Performance Management Framework approved by Council in September 2017 the Leader's report will cover updates on the Council Plan and key priorities including E&I Plan and Service Priorities.

1.0 Leader's Responsibilities

1.1 Key links to Council plan

The key Council plan target for 2019/20 covering the Leader's responsibilities is:

Lottery Revenue

Thanks to the generosity of supporters, as of the 15 August 2019, a total of £42,000 has now been raised for communities and charities since the lottery started in November 2017. Ticket sales have now reached 70,165. This is an increase of 9,543 from the Leader's previous report in June 2019.

The Community Lottery is now supporting a total of 54 local good causes. Since the Leader's last report we are delighted to welcome two new good causes to the Community Lottery - AED Donate and The Albrighton Trust. AED Donate is raising funds to help support the placement of automated external defibrillators within our communities. Very often these essential pieces of equipment make the difference between life and death. The Albrighton Trust offers educational and recreational activities for people disadvantaged by disability, special needs or illness. Activities include Angling, Woodcraft, Horticulture and Conservation and Wildlife.

1.2 Updates on key priorities

Financial Planning

On Tuesday, 30 July, the Audit and Risk Committee approved the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2018/19 and the Statement was duly uploaded to the Council's web-site ahead of the statutory deadline of 31 July.

Grant Thornton audited the draft statement of accounts and presented to the Committee an unqualified opinion that the accounts represented a "true and fair view of the financial position of the authority".

Broadly consistent with in-year monitoring and exactly as per the draft outturn reported to Informal Cabinet, the final position has enabled £1.6m to be added to the General Fund Reserves of the Council. It should be remembered however that this has been achieved partially as a result of the favourable VAT settlement which netted a one-off windfall of £1.3m in 2018/19.

The broad picture presented to Council in February when the budget for 2019/20 was approved and Council tax set remains unchanged. The Medium Term finances have been bolstered but the long term outlook remains one of significant uncertainty, particularly in relation to Central Government financing.

Strong financial discipline, regular budget monitoring and the achievement of the Council's Efficiency and Income programme remain the key priorities.

Policy and Partnerships

Dementia

A Family Awareness Event was held on 1 August 2019 at South Staffordshire Council providing information on the affects dementia has on a person including their perceptions, feelings and the way they communicate. Also the symptoms, signs and some behaviour changes and how a person affected by dementia could see situations which explain their behaviour and reactions. 30 people attended and feedback was very positive.

As a follow on from the above a Let's Work Together event – Dementia is taking place at South Staffordshire Council on 5 September 2019. This will bring together organisations who provide support to all people affected by dementia and offer support to South Staffordshire residents, plus a research organisation who is looking to learn more about the disease and possible prevention. The Keynote speakers are representatives from NHS England who will be presenting on the future prevalence of dementia and how services might need to change plus a networking opportunity with local support organisations. To book a place contact policyadmin@sstaffs.gov.uk or 01902 696289.

Let's Work Together (LWT)

LWT is taking place on 16 September 2019 which will look at Anti-Social Behaviour and the powers available to the local authority and the Housing Association. Also Defibrillator training to educate on the use of the equipment to help with cardiac arrest. To book a place contact policyadmin@sstaffs.gov.uk or 01902 696289.

Parish Summit

The Save the Date has been circulated for the Parish Summit – Friday, 11 October 2019 - 9.00am – 1.00pm. The agenda is to follow early September 2019.

District Member Budget

All District Members have a local budget of £500 to allocate to local initiatives, activities, events which will benefit their local community and links to at least one of the priorities in the Council Plan. For further information contact Maggie Quinn m.quinn@sstaffs.gov.uk or 01902 696530.

Good Life Wellbeing Association

The Good Life Wellbeing Association has commissioned a Lifestyle Roadshow Co-ordinator – Liz Minshall. She will be organising 12 roadshows over the forthcoming year highlighting services available that support local residents with physical and

mental health and wellbeing. A timetable of the roadshows will be available shortly. For more information contact liz.minshall@btopenworld.com

Tea and Teach

IT Buddies are now available in the libraries of Perton (every Tuesday 11.am – 1.00pm); Penkridge (every Wednesday 10.00am – 12.00pm) and Codsall (every Thursday 2.00pm – 4.00pm). To book on one of the sessions contact 0300 111 8000. There are also pilot sessions in Brewood (Friday, 23 August and Friday 27 September 10.00am – 12.00pm) – to book on a session contact 01902 850087.

Elections

Annual Canvass 2019:

Don't lose your voice - residents in South Staffordshire are urged to look out for their voter registration details in the post.

The Household Enquiry Form ensures that South Staffordshire Council can keep the electoral register up to date and identify any residents who are not registered so that they can be encouraged to do so. This will mean that residents will be able take part in any future elections.

People who have moved address recently are particularly encouraged to keep an eye out for the form and check the details. Research by the independent Electoral Commission indicates that recent home movers are far less likely to be registered than those that have lived at the same address for a long time. Please contact the elections team elections@sstaffs.gov.uk for more information.

Human Resources

Workforce Development updates and events

The Council has launched a new employee development scheme called 'My Review'. The new approach is based on the principle 'a lot less preparation and a lot more conversation' and will include at least monthly one-to ones and then a six monthly discussion called My Review. The discussion will focus on 3 themes:

- Council values
- Achievements/outcomes
- Development/issues

The Council's Workforce Development Strategy has recently been updated and now includes a new [apprentice and graduate policy](#). To promote this an information session on the Apprentice Levy has been arranged for managers, employees and our education partners for 3 October 2019.

2.0 REGULATORY SERVICES

2.1 Key links to Council plan

The key Council Plan targets covering Regulatory Services are:

- **100% planning enforcement cases investigated and 80% concluded within 12 weeks** – this information is currently not available due to a system issue, which we are working on with our suppliers – they are coming in to resolve the issue shortly and full figures will then be distributed to members
- **Investigate 100% of fly-tipping and agreed actions to resolve the problem within 2 working days** – this target has been achieved
- **At least 90% of residents feel safe in their homes in the day** – annual result from the BMG survey due in Autumn 2019; target across the Council Plan period currently stands at 93%
- **At least 75% of residents feel safe in their homes at night** - annual result from the BMG survey due in Autumn 2019; target across the Council Plan period currently stands at 77%

Planning Enforcement/Envirocrime

From 1 June 2019 to 18 August 160 enforcement cases were logged, of which 12 related to abandoned vehicles, 18 to fly tipping cases and 3 cases of traveller incursions. One of the traveller incursions was on Council owned land in Perton, one on Parish land in Great Wyrley and one on Ministry of Justice land in Featherstone. The police issued a Section 61 for Great Wyrley and the Council worked with Ministry of Justice and the police to facilitate the removal at Featherstone. All incursions were dealt with quickly.

Flytipping

Members may be already aware the incidents of fly tipping have substantially increased since last year at a cost to our residents. We continue to use methods to bring the offenders to prosecution to include the use of covert and overt cameras in various locations throughout the District. Maps are currently being prepared for a new RIPA application for the use of covert cameras in new hot spot locations.

Dog Fouling

Although we continue to deal with complaints from irresponsible dog owners who allow their dogs to foul, we are reliant on our residents to come forward with information about the owners of the dogs. Without this information, we are unable to issue Fixed Penalty Notices. The number of complaints has however decreased, due to new signage, poo bag dispensers and publicity being used via the parish councils.

Community Safety

Crime figures for the period from 1 April 2019 to 18 August 2019 in South Staffordshire show a reduction on the same period in 2018, with a reduction of 293 offences. This is in contrast to a slight increase in reported crime in the whole of Staffordshire.

Of note, Burglary Business and community is significantly down, with a reduction to 52 offences compared to 107 offences in the same period in 2018.

Theft from motor vehicles is also down with 59 less offences and theft of motor vehicles is also down 30 offences. Vehicle crime however is still a force priority, so South Staffordshire Policing team are able to bid for central resources to help address these issues.

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) continues to reduce in South Staffordshire. Over the last 12 months there has been a reduction of 10% on the numbers of cases reported, which equates to 176 less cases. 19% of all cases involve youths.

CCTV cameras are discussed at least once a month at the priority meeting with Staffordshire Police colleagues and locations changed if there is evidence that a location is a hot spot and would benefit from a CCTV camera being there.

Environmental Health and Licensing

Vine Inn, Dunsley Road, Kinver

Following an inspection of the Public House in May 2018, officers from Environmental Health & Licensing took evidence in relation to exceptionally poor conditions for both food hygiene and health and safety at the premises.

Statutory notices were served for a number of issues including for the lack of a food safety management system, poor electrical equipment - which potentially could have resulted in electric shock to employees using the equipment, poor cellar safety and prohibition of the children's play equipment and it was determined that prosecution was appropriate.

The owner pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 24 weeks imprisonment for health and safety offences and 24 weeks imprisonment for food hygiene offences, to run concurrently, reduced to 16 weeks to take into account his early guilty plea. Due to his age and health issues, this was suspended for 12 months. He was also ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £115 and the Council's prosecution costs of £8,513.59.

Following the deaths related to the listeria outbreak involving a sandwich company based in Stone and a meat products company in Salford, officers from Environmental Health & Licensing have reviewed the food businesses in South Staffordshire which are either classed as manufacturers or those requiring 'Approval' to ensure they are following the systems and procedures required of such businesses. Some food businesses have to be 'approved' if they process or handle certain foods of animal origin and supply these foods to other businesses. Businesses which fall under the approval requirements have been visited to ensure they are compliant.

The Licensing team have dealt with the following work;

Temporary Event notices – 105

New Premises Licence Applications -1

Variation to Premises Licences – 4
 Minor Variation- 3
 Transfers-3
 Vary DPS-11
 Personal licences 15

Complaints regarding licensed premises have increased during the summer months generally relating to noise, as the good weather encouraged people to spend social time outside of premises.

3.0 **BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION (ICT & Business Change)**

3.1 **Key links to Council Plan**

Improved Digital Accessibility and Customer Engagement by having:

- **Increased annual website visitors to 350,000 by March 2020**

June and July website visits are slightly down on previous months but this is to be expected due to the Leisure pages being separated from the Main website.

Website ‘visits’ are now recorded separately; one set of figures for the Main website and another for the Leisure website pages.

Month	Jun '19	Jul '19
Main Website Unique Visits	22,611	25,270
Leisure Website Unique Visits	8,432	10,649

- **Increase residents signed up to the ‘My Account’ to 3,500 by March 2020**

722 residents signed up for ‘My Account’ in June and July but as we have already achieved **6,137** sign ups to date, we have surpassed the yearly target of **3,500**. In addition to the new users, we have successfully processed **244** Bulky Waste requests, **58** Additional Green Bin requests, **80** Planning payments and **19** Licensing payments during June and July.

- **Increase Twitter followers to 9,000 by March 2020**

Total Followers for June and July was **31**, which is below the target of **78**. Current amount of Followers is currently at **8,663**.

Top 3 popular tweets in July include:

- *Come rain, wind or sun, our guys get the job done. Record temperatures set to hit the UK today but with 14,000 bins to be emptied in South Staffs, there's no stopping your bin crews. They're keeping hydrated and have plenty of sun lotion.*

If you see them, give them a wave. <https://t.co/LtMaWtE7N> (12 Likes, 1 Reply, 4 Retweets)

- *There are lots of bees enjoying the sunshine at our cemetery at Sytch Lane in Wombourne today. If you would like to find out more about our cemeteries please give us a call on 01902 696111. <https://t.co/ZLJYoNBZje> (6 Likes, 4 Replies, 1 Retweet)*
- *A huge thank you and well done to Simon Williams of the Wombourne Best Kept Village group who has been highly commended in the Volunteer of the Year category of the Volunteer Star Awards, which are organised by @SupportStaffs <https://t.co/FB1nfilx6U> (16 Likes, 2 Replies, 2 Retweets)*

- **Increase Facebook Likes to 4,500 by March 2020**

Total Likes for June and July was 47, which is below the target of 78. Current Facebook likes is now 4,386 but as we had a very good start to the year we are still on target to reach the 4,500.

Top 3 popular Facebook Likes in July include:

- *We have been notified of a scam text message which claims you are entitled to a refund from your council. This isn't from us, please ignore it, we would always notify you in writing if you were entitled to a refund. (35 Likes, 15 Comments, 101 Shares)*
- *It's been a good week for Martin Thomas Butchers, Pattingham. Not only have they retained their 5* rating at their latest food hygiene inspection but they also took gold, silver and bronze for their black pudding in an international competition held in Frankfurt known as the "world cup of food". Craig Thomas was the only UK entry. Well done to Craig and Martin and Maureen Thomas. (331 Likes, 56 Comments, 14 Shares)*
- *Declaration of result for the combined By-Election for Wombourne Parish South West Ward. BEAUMONT, Denis, Labour - 74 Votes DAVIES, Janice Marina Cheryl, Conservative - 327 Votes (elected) DAVIES, Michael William, Conservative - 353 Votes (elected) FULLER, Holly Joanna, Green Party - 108 Votes MCILVENNA, Claire, Green Party - 123 Votes (elected) MERRICK, Vincent Edward, Conservative - 326 Votes (elected) STONES, Peter William, Liberal Democrats - 118 Votes TAIT, Daisy, Conservative - 317 Votes (elected) VAUGHAN, Michael Thomas Martin, Labour - 59 Votes Turnout 15.4% (23 Likes, 11 Comments, 6 Shares)*

3.2 Update on key priorities

The Council's Business Transformation programme (focussed on enabling more staff to work agile and more services to be delivered digitally) continues to be delivered:

- 116 laptops have been deployed
- 9 workshops held with service teams to assist with agile working

- 2 (digital) service reviews have been undertaken leading to action plans and one in progress.

Work is also ongoing with regard to the Council's CRM (Customer Relations Management) systems and storage and document retention systems:

- A project to implement a new and updated CRM is in place and on track to be in place by September.
- Following the implementation of CRM, a new and improved Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) will be implemented which will facilitate more agile working and integrate our processes better - particularly in relation to Planning Services and Environmental Health and Planning Enforcement.

3.3 Update on operational priorities

Cyber Security - cyber security remains a key focus for the team. Training was received on the Cyber Champions' programme from Matthew and Kate at Staffordshire Police for all key system administrators on 31 July. Feedback received from the attendees has been positive and will assist to help continue the focus and drive on this important issue across the Council.

Interactive mapping tool for Strategic Planning consultations is currently being developed with the aim to go live in September.

ICT Support staff held 3 drop in sessions throughout July for Members to assist with any queries on systems and equipment.

4.0 WELFARE SERVICES (including customer services)

4.1 Key Links to Council Plan

The key Council plan targets for 2019/20 covering Welfare Services are:

- **Support 100 vulnerable people with multiple barriers to work through the Building Better Opportunities programme**

Between 1 April 2019 and 14 August 2019 the three Building Better Opportunities Advocates have supported 98 participants across Stafford and South Staffordshire with multiple barriers, to overcome these and move closer to employment. 45 of those receiving support are residents of South Staffordshire.

- **Support 200 economically inactive or unemployed working age people to either gain work, work experience, volunteer or receive education/training**

Between 1 April 2019 and 14 August 2019, South Staffordshire Work Clubs have supported 92 residents of South Staffordshire who are economically inactive or unemployed, to improve their skills in order to find work or work experience. Of these, 9 moved into sustained employment and 7 received accredited training. There were 3 people who had been economically inactive and they were

supported to become work ready and were able to job search independently. 10 of those supported have moved into a volunteering position.

4.2 Updates on Key Priorities

Council Tax

Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Rates

The collection rate for Council Tax as at 5 August stood at 41.9%, £27.6m collected against a total debit of £66.0m.

The collection rate for Business Rates stood at 18.6%, £10.9m collected against a total debit of £28.0m.

This compares favourably to this time last year and we are on track to achieve a minimum collection rate of 98% by March 2020.

Council Tax Discount Consultation

In July, the Council launched a consultation in respect of the proposed changes to Council Tax empty property discounts and premiums which are due to come into effect in April 2020.

The proposed changes will see a reduction in the amount of discount given to certain types of empty properties whilst also increasing premiums to long term empty properties. It is anticipated the changes will encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into occupation more quickly. The consultation is due to end on 31 August.

Customer Services

- Civil Ceremonies - we have now held six weddings since April 2019 and have received fantastic feedback from all the brides and grooms. We have a further five weddings booked in 2019 and three more in 2020.
- Post – we are on track with predicted postal spend but continue to reduce printing and post by encouraging alternative digital options such as email, self-service and on-line forms.
- Accommodation – we have welcomed 2 new tenants to the Business Hub accommodation services over the last 8 weeks.
- Events - we hosted an awareness day for Beacon Centre for the Blind this week showcasing how communities can get involved in their programmes.

Housing Benefits

Since 1 April 2019, the team has processed 351 new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support in an average of 14 days. During the same period 6,500 changes in circumstances have been processed in an average of 3 days.

Discretionary Housing Payments

Since 1 April 2019, we have paid out £23,540 in Discretionary Housing Payments; with a further £3,000 committed spend over the next couple of months. A third of all applications are because of a shortfall in rent due to the property having more bedrooms than required under benefit regulations.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit has now fully rolled out across South Staffordshire for most new claims for working age people. The latest figures from the Department for Work and Pensions report that as at the end of February 2019, there were 1,488 households in South Staffordshire on Universal Credit.

Safeguarding

The Annual Report 2017/2018 was recently submitted to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

A Joint Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board has been established to ensure arrangements are in place under the new Working Together Legislation. This presents opportunities to design a partnership structure, without the bureaucracy of previous legislation and statutory guidance that enables the best for the children in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

The District Safeguarding Sub Group has been disbanded with safeguarding discussions at county level now being held within a newly formed District Partnership Group.

Homelessness Prevention

The aim of Housing and Welfare Services is to provide excellent housing advice and assistance, preventing homelessness wherever possible. The team work well to achieve these aims, along with Revenues and Benefits, who ensure that customers are in receipt of their correct benefits.

The following table illustrates the number of homelessness interviews that the team have completed during the last three months.

Interviews	
Closed cases	110
Awaiting interview/ scheduled interview	4
Prevention	15
Relief	7
Total number of interviews	133

Housing and Welfare Services are successfully preventing homelessness – as a consequence the Council has still only accepted the “full duty” of homelessness under the legislation for one application since the commencement of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April last year. However, approaches are increasing, with as many as five contacts in one day in recent weeks.

The reasons for homelessness have also become more complex with an increase in mental health problems including anxiety and depression as well as addiction, self-

harm and suicide threats. Many of the applicants are single people and therefore the demand for affordable one bedroom flats is increasing.

Work continues with other Local Authorities through joint working groups to help resolve issues around certain vulnerable groups such as Care Leavers and Ex-offenders.

Housing Support

The table below confirms the number of applications currently registered on the Council’s Housing Register and this figure is steadily increasing.

<u>Housing Register</u>	<u>Applications</u>
Banding	
High	71
Medium	398
Low	215
<u>Total</u>	<u>684</u>

The table below illustrates the 46 properties that were available for nomination by property type since April 2019:

Properties	Type
3 Bedroom Houses	15
2 Bedroom Houses	8
2 Bedroom Bungalows	4
2 Bedroom Flats	12
1 Bedroom Flats	7

Stay-Safe

Since the beginning of April this year the Council has received thirteen new referrals for the installation of security equipment to keep victims of domestic abuse safer in their own homes, potentially reducing the disruption of refuge accommodation and alternative re-housing.

Landlord’s Forum

The Bi-Annual Landlord’s Forum is due to take place on 2 October 2019, and topics will include information on Universal Credit – avoiding rent arrears, energy efficiency, and a presentation by Probation Support Services. All are welcome to attend.

5.0 COMMUNITY SERVICES

5.1 Key Links to Council Plan Targets – A Safe and Sustainable District

An update on the Council plan targets for 2019/20 covering Community Services is included below:

Reused, recycled or composted at least 53% of household waste.

Provisional figures reveal that between April and June 2019 South Staffordshire residents reused, recycled and composted 56% of household waste. However the **estimated outturn figure for 2019/20 currently stands at circa 51%.**

5.2 Updates on Key Priorities

Bereavement Services

During June, July and August, across the two cemeteries, nine lawn burials, six burials of cremated remains and three scatterings of cremated remains were carried out. Income for the two sites for June, July and August (including memorial permit applications and sales of pre-purchased plots) has increased from £15,660.62 in 2018 to £26,981.00 in 2019, which is an increase of £11,320.38 (72.3%).

The Team are now working with Strategic Solutions (marketing consultants) on several promotional activities with a view to increasing brand awareness and in turn, increasing sales of pre-purchased plots and increasing the number of bookings.

Waste & Recycling

- Financial out-turns reveal that the cost of household waste collection per household during 2018/19 was £48.44, equivalent to 93p per week.
- The number of missed bins reported during June and July 2019, a key performance indicator for the service, on average across the three principal waste streams (residual, recyclable and organic) was recorded as 9.7 per 100,000 collections. This is well within the target of 20 missed bins per 100,000 collections.
- Since the launch of the Council's My Account function over 1,750 residents have booked bulky waste collections online and 98% of respondents to an online survey stated that the service was easy to use.
- The latest South Staffordshire Review newsletter outlines the journey of a plastic bottle recycled in South Staffordshire, whilst the Recycling Performance webpage on the Council website has been updated to detail all companies that received waste and recyclable material from South Staffordshire and its contractors during 2018/19.
- A member of the Waste and Recycling team gave oral evidence to the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into plastic packaging in the Houses of Parliament during July 2019, sharing directly with lawmakers the impact of proposed waste and recycling policies on the residents of South Staffordshire.

Street Scene

- South Staffordshire Council will soon be working in partnership with an environmental education provider who will be using the Jubilee Wood in Bilbrook to deliver a variety of adult education courses. These form part of the Community Learning Framework for Staffordshire County Council and are aimed

at supporting the community, to access courses that will help them improve their health, wellbeing, confidence and skills. These will hopefully be starting on site in September 2019 and see a programme of dates run until August 2023.

- Fly-tipping remains very high with 390 incidents removed between April and June 2019 putting additional pressure on the Street Scene Team.
- Grass cutting remains in operation across the District with an additional mower brought in during July and August to allow the team to catch up on cutting of the Districts open spaces and Highway verges.
- The annual sightline pruning is now being undertaken and it is anticipated this will be completed within the next 4 weeks.

Leisure and Facilities

Baggeridge Country Park

- The car park extension is close to completion and work is currently being carried out by David Wilson Homes to address the issue with the SUDS pool.
- Surveys have been carried out for the conversion of the ticket machines at the park to accept card payments. This will enhance staff security and reduce the amount of cash to reduce the risk of crime and damage to the ticket machines.

Leisure Centres

Performance

LEISURE CENTRE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2019/20

<u>ALL LEISURE CENTRES</u>	April - March Original Budget	April - July Budget YTD	April - July Actual	Variation YTD	Variance YTD
	£	£	£	£	%
Employees (excl Agency)	1,335,800	445,480	444,640	-840	-0.19
Agency Staff	212,000	70,640	67,278	-3,362	-4.76
Other Direct Expenses	211,400	80,280	76,126	-4,154	-5.17
Joint User Recharge	488,900	163,000	163,000	0	0.00
Total Operating Costs	2,248,100	759,400	751,043	-8,357	-1.10
Total Income	-2,298,600	-755,650	-797,303	-41,653	5.51
					-
Operating Cost Less Income	-50,500	3,750	-46,260	-50,010	1,333.59
Service Admin	162,480	56,243	51,717	-4,526	-8.05
Financing Costs	57,900	19,320	19,320	0	0.00
Net General Fund Charge	169,880	79,313	24,777	-54,535	-68.76
Income (% of Operating Costs)	102.25%	99.51%	106.16%		6.65%
Income (% of Total Costs)	93.12%	90.50%	96.99%		6.48%

- The Leisure Centres have exceeded their overall 100% performance target of income against operating costs, and have achieved 106.16%. At this period last year the service achieved 100.57%

Leisure Centre Refurbishment

The final draft for the revised Joint agreement is being finalised and will be issued to partner schools on their return in September.

Penkridge Leisure Centre

The boiler refurbishment is currently underway with the pool set to re-open shortly.

Couch to 5k at Cheslyn Hay

A successful couch to 5k programme has been run at Cheslyn Hay leisure centre. 44 adults and children enrolled on the course with the aim to go from non runners to be able to run 5k.

Membership

July's membership saw an up lift in numbers up to 3,921; so far this year membership has not dropped below 3,900 and cancelations have reduced on last year by 3%.

Swim academy remains on par with last year, despite the closure at Penkridge. A loss of 5 members only at Penkridge Leisure Centre despite the closure of the pool over the summer.

Facilities

- The Council's Catering tender goes live on the 16 August and currently we have 12 interested parties.
- CCTV has been installed at the community building at Baggeridge by our staff saving £1,000 against quotes received.

Emergency Planning

The Council will be conducting an emergency planning exercise on 9 October 2019, named Exercise FIBRE. The scenario is based on the forthcoming building work causing an issue at the council offices. An off-site command and control post will be set up in the Methodist Church car park and each team will be asked to simulate activation of their business continuity plans.

6.0 PLANNING & BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

6.1 Key links to Council plan

The key Council plan targets for 2019/20 covering Planning and Business Enterprise are:

- **At least 150 businesses are assisted with 85% stating they are satisfied with the support they receive** - to date 43 businesses have been assisted with 100% satisfaction.

Strategic Planning

Local Plans

We are aiming to begin the public consultation on the Local Plan review Spatial Strategy and Infrastructure Delivery in autumn this year, subject to Member approval. The Local Plans Team continues to develop the evidence base to support the review and a strategic Green Belt Study and Landscape Study are close to being finalised. Two surveys are currently underway for retail provision, looking at shopping trends; and into the quality and quantity of our public open spaces. The information we collect from three surveys will help us to plan for future needs.

The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has recently been revised and consulted on and it is anticipated that it will be formally adopted by Council in September 2019. The SCI sets out how the Council will consult on local planning documents and in the determination planning applications.

Housing Strategy

Work is continuing on a refresh of the Council's Affordable Housing and Housing Mix Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This update will reflect recent changes to national policy on affordable housing and other matters and will strengthen the Council's position when negotiating on housing sites that come forward in the District. Public consultation on the draft SPD will take place in the autumn to gather views and feedback from developers, land owners, affordable housing providers and residents.

Energy Conservation

The Council's Warmer Homes scheme has been able to access funding for private householders and tenants to benefit from being connected to mains gas along with a new first time gas-fired central heating system, all installed free of charge where the homeowner is on a low income.

The scheme is funded using the Warm Homes Fund, established by National Grid to support local authorities working in partnership with them. We are working with Staffordshire County Council, Eon and Affordable Warmth Solutions to help further fund and successfully deliver the scheme in South Staffordshire and ensure households can easily afford to heat their homes comfortably.

We are currently working on a project in Featherstone to replace expensive electric storage heating in a number of homes but would encourage anyone to apply if they do not have a mains gas connection or gas-fired central heating. Households will also qualify if they already have a gas connection but are only using it for cooking or a gas fire, to receive a new gas-fired central heating system.

The scheme has been published on the Council website at:

<https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/environment/help-to-keep-your-home-warm-2.cfm>

Regeneration Team

Skills and Jobs Fair

Our second Skills and Jobs Fair has been confirmed for 20 September 2019 at the Council offices. We are aiming to have around 40 businesses in attendance with the expectation of real vacancies for attendees to apply for. We will also be working with relevant support services and ensuring all attendees feel supported in receiving the assistance they need to become job ready.

Social Media Update

The Business Hub has attracted 162 new followers/links on our Social Media platforms, now at 3937. This is an increase of 5% since the previous report. Over the coming months we plan to use these links/contacts to promote several items we are currently working on such as The Good life Energy scheme, Business Breakfast, Education and Skills Plan and also our Skills and Jobs Fair.

Business Assists

Our Business Assists are slightly down for this quarter compared to last year, however to date we have assisted 43 businesses. These range from start-up support, finance advice, tax information, location and premise enquiries. The business satisfaction rate is currently 100%.

Business Breakfast

Planned for 11 September we are hosting a Business Breakfast for a number of larger businesses from across the district. The event will aim to cover and allow businesses to have a voice over what support they would like to receive from us and to highlight any issues they currently have or foresee happening as a result of Brexit and a shift in the economy. We are also hoping for a representative from the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to attend to discuss their activities and their Local Industrial Strategy. An event for our smaller businesses will be held at a later date.

GoodLife Energy Scheme

From now on The Good Life Energy Scheme will be known as 'B Energy'. Working with our marketing consultants we have established the brand needs a more professional and bold look that reflects our existing Business Hub branding. Designs are currently being approved and the website, marketing collateral and social media advertisements are due to be launched early September, with the aim to achieve higher levels of take up.

Estates and Assets (including commercial property; Industrial Units; Hinksford)

Commercial Development

Construction on the Four Ashes Enterprise Park expansion is now commencing with the work on the relocation of the high voltage overhead electricity cables now almost complete. It is anticipated that the new industrial units will be completed in April 2020.

Members have recently approved the business case for the proposed expansion of Unit 4e, Station Road, Four Ashes, to support the business expansion of our existing tenant in the unit. Officers are currently working through contractual arrangements with the tenant and our project team with a view to submitting a planning

application in the autumn, and if approved, commencing development shortly thereafter.

Officers are working with our external project team to progress proposals for the redevelopment of Wombourne Enterprise Park. Pre-application discussions have taken place with our Development Management team and designs are being finalised before a full planning application is submitted later in the year. A full update on the project will be brought to Members in September.

Building Control & Land Charges

After the first four months of the new expanded shared service arrangements hosted by Lichfield District Council, the performance indicators for the service are broadly on target and no major issues are being reported.