

**Staffordshire Connects Joint Committee**

**MINUTES OF THE STAFFORDSHIRE CONNECTS PARTNERSHIP  
JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING**

**10am Friday 18th December 2009  
at County Buildings, Stafford**

Present:

**East Staffordshire Borough Council**

Mr. S. Khan

**Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough  
Council**

Cllr Mrs. H. Morris  
Mr. K.P. Turner

**Stafford Borough Council**

Cllr M.M. Heenan  
Mr. M. Vickers

**Staffordshire Moorlands District  
Council**

Cllr T.D. Hall  
Mr. A.P. Stokes

**Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

Mr. R. Atienza-Hawkes  
Cllr R. Irving

**Lichfield District Council**

Cllr C. Greatorex

**South Staffordshire District Council**

Cllr B.R. Edwards  
Mr. S. Winterflood

**Staffordshire County Council**

Mr. A. Edwards  
Mr. S. Kristel  
Ms. F. Sawford  
Cllr M. Winnington

**Staffordshire Parish Councils'  
Association**

Mrs. V. Evans

**Tamworth Borough Council**

Cllr J. Oates  
Mrs. T. Yeomans

**Also in Attendance:**

Mrs. L. Adams-Collett – Business Manager (Core Team);  
Mrs. N. Sawyer – County Manager, Access and Information, Social Care and Health  
Directorate;  
Mrs. R. Wilson – Interim Director (Core Team)

**Apologies:** Mr. H. Brunt (Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association); Mr. A. Compton  
MBE (Staffordshire Police Authority); Mr. A. O'Brien (Staffordshire Chief Executives)

**PART ONE**

**Minutes of the Staffordshire Connects Partnership  
Joint Committee Meeting held on 2 October 2009**  
(Schedule 1)

30. **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2009 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**Minutes of the Staffordshire Connects Partnership  
Strategic Advisory Board Meeting held on 3 December 2009**  
(Schedule 2)

31. **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Staffordshire Connects Partnership Strategic Advisory Board meeting held on 3 December 2009 be noted.

**2009/10 Budget Update**  
(Schedule 3)

32. The Joint Committee considered a report of the County Council's Director of Finance regarding the budget position for 2009/2010 (Quarter 3).

Forecast expenditure was expected to be £62,000 less than budget and the major variances were highlighted for Members' information, as follows:-

(i) Staffing Costs – The Core Team were currently carrying vacancies whilst the recruitment and selection processes for the revised management arrangements, agreed at the meeting on 2 October 2009, were implemented. It was anticipated that these vacancies would remain until 2010/11 financial year. With regard to the Information Security Compliance Officer post, some of the responsibilities were being covered temporarily by the contractor who had been appointed to deal with security and technical issues.

(ii) Transitional Costs – The costs associated with moving the Core Team office to Stafford Borough Council's premises had been less than anticipated. Therefore, the financing transfer from reserves would be for a correspondingly lower amount.

(iii) Travel and Subsistence Costs – These were less than had been budgeted for in the year to date owing to the implementation of the revised management arrangements referred to in (i) above and various new projects having not yet commenced.

Members noted that the balance in the General Reserve as at 1 April 2009 was £268,000. Against this sum were commitments for the CRM upgrade and transitional costs and the forecast balance of the reserve as at 31 March 2010 was as follows:-

<b>Staffordshire Connects General Reserve</b>	<b>£</b>
Opening Balance as at 1 April 2009	268,000
<b>Committed Spend</b>	
CRM Upgrade	(102,940)
Transitional Costs in 2009/10	(74,300)
<b>Uncommitted Balance</b>	<b>90,760</b>
Planned Contribution to Reserves in 2009/10	65,000
Forecast Spend in 2009-10	53,300
<b>Forecast Balance at 31 March 2010</b>	<b>209,060</b>

Whilst Members noted that the uncommitted balance of £209,060 was available to fund projects, it would be necessary to maintain a prudent level of reserves in order to safeguard business continuity. They welcomed the achievement of savings across the partnership during 2009/10 and considered that the fundamental changes being made to the operating arrangements would also provide partner authorities with improved support.

33. **RESOLVED** – That the report on the current financial position of the Partnership during 2009/10 (Quarter 3) be received and noted.

#### **2010/11 Budget** (Schedule 4)

34. The Joint Committee considered a report of the County Council's Director of Finance regarding the proposed 2010/11 Partnership Budget.

The proposed Core Budget for 2010/11 was £180,400 which fully reflected the revised management arrangements that had been agreed at their meeting on 2 October 2009. The total budget (Core and Customer Relationship Management (CRM)) for 2010/11 consolidated the £200,000 savings achieved during the previous year, allowing it to remain at the same level as in 2009/10.

The CRM budget for 2010/11 was £627,500 which represented a reduction of £87,500 compared to 2008/09. No provision had been made for inflationary increases and Members noted that the outcome of the review currently being undertaken into CRM support could possibly result in a reduction in costs and an under spend against this amount.

Total contributions of £807,900 were therefore required from Partners to finance core activities and CRM support and development, as follows:-

	2010/11 Core Budget (£)	2010/11 CRM Budget (£)	2010/11 Total Core & CRM Budget (£)
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	18,040	101,130	119,170
Staffordshire County Council	18,040	98,050	116,090
Lichfield District Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
Tamworth Borough Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
Stafford Borough Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
Cannock Chase District Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
East Staffordshire Borough Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
Newcastle Borough Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
South Staffordshire District Council	18,040	53,540	71,580
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>180,400</b>	<b>627,500</b>	<b>807,900</b>

With regard to the General Reserve, as at 31 March 2009, the balance totalled £268,000. However, against this sum were commitments relating to the CRM upgrade and transitional costs. The forecast balance of the reserve as at 31 March 2010 was therefore £209,060.

In the discussion which ensued, the Joint Committee acknowledged the efforts which had been made to identify savings and efficiencies across the Partnership which had led to a reduction in the proposed Partner contributions for 2010/11.

35. **RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That the proposed 2010/11 Partnership Budget of £807,900 and individual partner contributions as set out above, be approved.

### Work Plan Progress (Schedule 5)

36. The Partnership's Interim Director presented a report detailing the progress to date on various matters within the scope of the Staffordshire Connects Partnership including:-

- (i) Governance Arrangements;
- (ii) Delivering the Work Plan – Programme Management Requirements;
- (iii) Core Team Staffing;
- (iv) Communications;
- (v) Finance;
- (vi) Risk Assessment and;
- (vii) Further Opportunities for Joint Working.

With regard to Core Team Staffing, the Interim Director reported that the interviews for the post of Director (Part Time) would be held in January 2010. The Interview Panel would comprise (i) the Chairman of the Joint Committee; (ii) Mr. A. O'Brien as representative of the Staffordshire Chief Executives' Group and; (iii) Sander Kristel, Strategic Director.

Members also noted that all applications for this post had been from within partners' existing staffing establishments.

37. **RESOLVED** – That the report be received and noted.

**Delivering the Work Plan – Scoping and Funding Projects**  
(Schedule 6)

38. The Joint Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director regarding progress with the scoping and funding of the various projects included in the approved work programme.

**(i) Shared Services/Systems – Lead Authority – Cannock Chase District Council**

A survey had recently been undertaken to identify the current position on shared services at partner authorities. The survey aimed to identify (i) any further opportunities which existed for closer working between partners where similar systems/technologies were being used; (ii) what represented good practice for the shared services already in operation and; (iii) the aspirations around shared services which warranted further discussion.

However, the primary objective of the project was to research partner experiences and dissemination of information and advice on difficult and resource intensive items (eg contract law, general legal advice, human resources, finance, procurement, service level agreements, business improvement methodology, partnership working and the use of external providers), which could be very different when working towards shared services.

The Partnership Strategic Advisory Board had previously noted various major shared service projects in progress where the potential to capture and share learning was substantial, ie (i) Tamworth Borough and Lichfield District Councils Joint Waste Service; (ii) Cannock Chase District and Stafford Borough Councils Implementation of Joint Services across all areas of the Council's activities and; (iii) East Staffordshire Borough and South Derbyshire District Councils work towards the provision of a single recycling, waste collection and street cleaning service operating across the whole of the two districts.

It was anticipated that the new Administrative Assistant within the Core Team would undertake regular updates of the survey, as resources permitted.

**(ii) Customer Knowledge – Joint Lead Tamworth Borough, Newcastle Borough, Stoke-on-Trent City and Staffordshire County Councils**

Partner Authorities had recognised the benefits from having a better understanding of customer needs and preferences through the use of customer profiling tools and extracting relevant data from core systems like the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Therefore the opportunities for partners to obtain savings from buying customer profiling tools together were currently being investigated. However, at this stage it was anticipated that a discount of between 15 – 20% could be negotiated from joint procurement of the chosen solution.

There were two further aspects to this project ie (i) sharing best practice as to how customer insight was undertaken and; (ii) undertaking work on common issues where all partners could potentially benefit. Accordingly, the following two possible areas where best practice could be shared in relation to customer insight had been identified:- (i) understanding how and where to target take-up campaigns for the 2011 census and; (ii) researching the needs and preferences of potential client groups for a Social Care and Health project relating to Blue Badges.

Project (ii) above was of considerable significance and formed the basis of a funding bid to the Communities and Local Government National Efficiency and Transformation Fund, part of which was aimed specifically at supporting innovative customer knowledge projects.

In presenting the report, the Interim Executive Director referred to the tight timescale for completion of the joint procurement aspect of the initiative owing to the expiry of existing licences at some partner Authorities.

### **(iii) Adult Social Care and Health – Blue Badges – Joint Lead Authorities East Staffordshire Borough and Staffordshire County Councils**

This project focused on the work that would be generated by the Staffordshire Cares Vision for adult social care in the County which included (i) the provision of one-stop shops and information points and; (ii) the rationalisation of assets and locations for service delivery.

A clear role had been identified for Staffordshire Connects in assisting with the options analysis for the implementation of the vision, identifying and disseminating good practice and opportunities for achieving savings and efficiencies. More specifically, the two objectives of the project were (i) to identify existing and potential opportunities to redesign processes/share service level agreements on the delivery of Blue Badge Services, joint provision of services through one-stop shops and delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (Aids and Adaptations) and; (ii) to examine functions and responsibilities across partners for personalisation of social care so that any business process improvements could be made as necessary.

It was anticipated that there would be significant resource requirements to take this project forward. Therefore, it was proposed to submit a robust bid to the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership for approximately £120,000 to fund detailed work with each partner and initial piloting of solutions.

### **(iv) Streetscene – Joint Lead Authorities Stafford Borough and Staffordshire County Council**

Development of this project was under consideration by the Strategic Director who was reviewing whether there were any areas that would benefit from further work.

**(v) Customer First/CRM – Lead Authority Staffordshire Moorlands District Council**

Visits to Partner Authorities were being made by the Interim Director together with a Director from Staffordshire Moorlands District Council in order to discuss the vision for Customer Services and the opportunities for greater partnership working. This work had highlighted the need for a review of the current operation of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) support system which would be expected to deliver savings in the forthcoming financial year.

The other area of focus for this project was the opportunity to use the CRM to support joint working from a shared service perspective and improve county/district service delivery. Work had previously been undertaken on a Customer Access Strategy which would be revisited to identify where greater benefit could be gained from a joint approach to Customer Services, and the use of the CRM system by partners.

In the discussion which ensued, the officer representative of East Staffordshire Borough Council spoke of the benefit the current CRM system had been to his Authority and he gave an example of where they had achieved a £50,000 saving through a CRM based initiative. He therefore urged all partners to make similar use of the system in order to release savings at their own Authorities where appropriate opportunities existed.

**(vi) Life Events – Joint Lead Authorities South Staffordshire District and Staffordshire County Councils**

This project focused on how Partner Authorities shared data and integrated service delivery when dealing with residents who wished to register bereavements. It linked to a national project entitled “Tell Us Once” which was investigating the sharing of similar data from a Central Government perspective. However, the Staffordshire Project would also focus on improving service delivery.

It was proposed that a bid for £35,000 be made to the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership in order to undertake an analysis of (i) what data was currently shared and how; (ii) what services were directly delivered, where and by whom; (iii) the implications for the Partners of the “Tell Us Once” project and; (iv) the Identification of opportunities to improve processes, make savings and improve the customer experience.

Members noted that rather than being pursued in isolation, this project would lead to consideration of further opportunities for joint working between Authorities under the Local Area Agreement. The Interim Executive Director added that the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership had been particularly interested in this area of work, and the potential for sharing lessons/good practice with other Authorities both regionally and nationally.

The Member Representative of Stoke-on-Trent City Council welcomed news of this initiative as a further opportunity for reducing costs and providing a better, more sensitive service to the residents of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

**(vii) Business Matters/Better Regulation – Joint Lead Authorities  
Lichfield District and Staffordshire County Councils**

The aim of this project was to transform service delivery to business customers and linked into a wider project being lead by Lichfield District Council involving a number of West Midlands Authorities, Business Link, and other regulatory bodies. In addition, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue had also expressed an interest at becoming involved.

Funding had been made available from external sources, and Staffordshire Connects' input would focus on the dissemination of the standards and tools which had been developed. This would be undertaken within existing resources.

**(viii) Mobile Working – Lead Authority Stoke-on-Trent City Council**

Members noted that this project was still at a research stage in understanding what types of mobile working were currently in operation across Partner Authorities, and where opportunities might exist to gain efficiencies.

During her presentation of the report, the Interim Executive Director emphasised that applications for funding would only be sought in support of the priorities which had been set by the Partnership. She reassured members that the Core Team would not be pursuing sources of funding for projects which were not already included on the list of agreed strategic priorities. The Officer Representative from East Staffordshire Borough Council then commented that his Authority's Chief Executive was fully supportive of the recommendation contained in the report. The Chief Executive of South Staffordshire District Council added that Staffordshire Chief Executives' Group were supportive of the initiatives outlined in the report. With regard to the co-ordination and interaction with other authorities in the West Midlands, the Interim Executive Director confirmed that various existing forums enabled discussion and sharing of best practice at a regional level.

39. **RESOLVED** – That the report be received and noted.

**Transforming Adult Social Care and Health**

40. The Joint Committee received a presentation with PowerPoint slides (as appended to the signed minutes of the meeting) from Mrs. Nicola Sawyer, County Manager, Access and Information on the vision and scope of the "Staffordshire Cares Direct" initiative. This was a transformational project relating to the provision of information, advice and advocacy to Adult Social Care Service Users in Staffordshire.

Following a detailed evaluation it had been found that much of the information currently provided to clients/service users was confusing, difficult to access, and not written with its target audience in mind. Also, the processes required to receive services were complex and members of the public often had to repeat their requests. In general there was no structured framework for the provision of information on the Adult Social Care and Health Services currently provided by Partners.

The initiatives' vision was to ensure that information provided to clients was open, accessible and of interest to specific groups, both active and passive. Also, that appropriate advice and guidance was given regarding a particular course of action in order to realise a need, access a service or obtain an entitlement. With regard to advocacy it was important to recognise the centrality of clients/services users. An important part of the project was to integrate information/advice given by the Directorate with that offered by District/Borough Councils, the NHS and other Partners, as appropriate.

The scope of the review included the provision of (i) information provided by the web; (ii) face to face contact with clients/services users; (iii) county-wide information points and; (iv) a single phone number providing a gateway to information, advice and signposting.

In the discussion which ensued, the Member Representative of the County Council enquired about the information currently provided by District/Borough Councils and other Partners. In reply, Nicola Sawyer said that whilst there were examples of good practice, there was no strategic framework relating to the Staffordshire Cares Model. The Strategic Director commented that whilst previously information had been provided on a piece-meal basis, there was now an opportunity for Partners to co-operate for the benefit of service users. In addition, it was hoped that efficiency savings could also be released.

The Interim Executive Director explained that whilst efficiency savings were important, the provision of timely, accurate information and a better understanding of the needs of service users might also release savings by reducing demand for more expensive interventions. She went on to refer to the opportunities available for obtaining national funding for the project and said that these would be investigated at the appropriate time. With regard to the possibility of providing links with other services eg housing and Streetscene, whilst the potential had already been identified, further assessments would be required before moving forward in these areas.

The Chairman then thanked Mrs. Sawyer on behalf of the Joint Committee for an interesting and informative presentation.

41. **RESOLVED** – That the presentation be received and noted.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

42. **RESOLVED** – That a further meeting of the Staffordshire Connects Joint Committee be held on 26 March 2010 at 10.00 am at a venue to be notified.

**CHAIRMAN**

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Documents referred to in these minutes as Schedules are not appended, but will be attached to the signed copy of the Minutes of the meeting. Copies, or specific information contained in them, may be available on request.