

our city



New nursery is **community hub**

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Christmas and
New Year refuse
collection dates

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Work to build a great legacy for our city has already started

By City Council Leader Councillor **MOHAMMED PERVEZ**

STOKE-on-Trent is one of the fastest growing cities in the UK because we have created an environment to encourage jobs and growth, help new and existing businesses and improve the quality of life for everyone who lives and works here.

On this page you can read more about our continuing battle to secure an HS2 station, and tens of millions of pounds worth of financial benefit every year, to our city.

Our arguments are sound, our business case is strong, and our proposal makes sense in every way. We will fight to be heard and will challenge the decision to ignore Stoke-on-Trent's case... the best case for HS2. This is important because the rebirth of Stoke-on-Trent has started and is gathering pace.

We have unveiled our exciting, ambitious vision for our city's future, with plans for new homes, new jobs, new businesses, better education and better quality of life.

But progress is happening now. In this issue of *Our City* are three pages of exciting news about how we are helping local companies to create new jobs and recruit new staff.

Growing business means more jobs... and more jobs mean better living standards and quality of life.

So we have to be ambitious, because those ambitions are attracting the attention of Government and companies that Stoke-on-Trent is going places and is worth investment.

I will work with any agency, any company, and any individual who genuinely has the interests of Stoke-on-Trent at heart.

One of my key priorities is to provide a better quality of life and a better future for the people of our city. That's why we have set our stall out to provide the economic growth which will power investment in a better city centre, better schools, better homes and roads and better health... an all round better quality of life for our people.

Our city has huge potential. I was really encouraged when I visited a high school as part of local democracy week to see the enthusiasm and passion our young people have for Stoke-on-Trent. They see a future in this city.

Education results are improving, and so are the prospects for training, apprenticeships and eventual employment.

Each and every one of them is part of our future, but so is everyone else who lives and works in Stoke-on-Trent.

I would like to call on everyone with the best interests of our city at heart to show their passion, demonstrate their enthusiasm for the future and do their bit – not for me and not for the city council, but for the city, for its people and for the future.

Our city's future will be our great legacy, and the work to build it has already started.

Campaigners determined to press home case

CAMPAIGNERS have expressed deep disappointment at HS2 Chairman Sir David Higgins' recommendation that the new high speed rail route should bypass the city and stop outside Crewe instead.

But Government Ministers still say they have not made their final decision yet. Business leaders say the city has to keep on pressing its case to ensure it is connected into the massive boost to jobs and prosperity that HS2 could bring.

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Chair David Frost said it would be a huge missed opportunity.

He said: "Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP, working with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council, has been really successful in promoting the city as a key investment location. We have been one of the top performing partnerships in the country in attracting match funding from Government. This is a success story.

"It makes absolutely no sense to risk this by isolating the city region. We need continuity and stability to keep growing our economy. Any decision on HS2 has to put Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire at the heart of the equation."

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce President Jonathan Mitchell said Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire businesses would not accept being side-lined by any decision on HS2.

He said: "This is a city which is undergoing a real renaissance in enterprise and business energy.

"It is the largest city region between Birmingham and Manchester with a population of almost 500,000. It is growing fast as a centre of enterprise and education.

"It's a true university city and a leading centre of developing advanced materials technology. Stoke-on-Trent is HS2 ready.

"If HS2 is all about connecting up cities, the nation's engines of growth, it makes no sense to bypass Stoke-on-Trent. This city should be a key member of the northern powerhouse city club. It is the natural industrial gateway between the Midlands and the north."

"We have made so much progress. This is a city with huge potential.

"It has to work with us to maintain the momentum and keep Stoke-on-Trent on track as a key player in the growth in national prosperity. HS2 is a once in a lifetime investment in the nation's economy and the decision has to deliver maximum return for the taxpayer."

City Council Leader Councillor

Mohammed Pervez said the team would look at every option available to protect the interests of the city and North Staffordshire.

He said: "If this city region is bypassed in favour of the town of Crewe, with a population of just 70,000, then this decision could cost the region over £200 million a year of lost growth potential.

"The Government has still to make a decision but if they go with Sir David's recommendations then we will look at every option open to us. There appears to be no mechanism in place to support those areas which lose out as a result.

"Stoke-on-Trent is undergoing a major economic renaissance and has enormous future growth potential. HS2 would supercharge that growth.

"We will continue to talk through the issues and the opportunities with Government and other organisations to ensure that this wonderful city and its people are not penalised. One thing is sure, they won't be able to ignore Stoke-on-Trent."

Why the Stoke Route is the best:

BETTER FOR LOCAL JOBS – maximises economic growth, jobs and opportunity for local people.

BETTER FOR BRITAIN – liberates Stoke-on-Trent's massive growth potential and achieves more economic impact for the country.

CHEAPER FOR YOU – £billions savings for tax payers.

FASTER – connects you to more cities direct, and sooner.

GREENER – uses brownfield land (land previously used for industrial or commercial use) in the city rather

than cutting through the countryside.

The Government says HS2 is all about connecting up cities and maximising economic growth. By any objective analysis the Stoke Route wins out on every criteria. To see the full business case go to stoke.gov.uk/HS2.



UNITED FRONT: Members of the delegation who travelled to Westminster to put the city's case for HS2, left to right, Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce Policy Manager Jane Gratton, Stoke-on-Trent North MP Joan Walley, City Council Leader Councillor Mohammed Pervez, Stoke-on-Trent South MP Rob Ffello, Stoke Route Project Director Dr Alan James, City Council Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Transportation Councillor Ruth Rosenau, City Council Director of Place John Betty and Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce Chief Executive Sara Williams.



Our City is printed on recycled paper. When you have finished with this publication please help the environment by passing it on to a friend or recycling it.

Live webcast of full council meetings

MEETINGS of the full council can now be viewed online. To see and hear the debates and decisions which affect life in Stoke-on-Trent, visit stoke.gov.uk and click on webcasting.

A list of dates and times of council meetings and committee meetings can be found on our website at stoke.gov.uk/meetingdates



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 Facebook: [facebook.com/stokeontrent.citycouncil](https://www.facebook.com/stokeontrent.citycouncil)
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twitter.com/SoTCityCouncil

Give us your feedback on this issue of **Our City** by emailing ourcity@stoke.gov.uk or write to: **FREEPOST Our City.**

CHRISTMAS is coming – and many children and young people will want the most up to date gadgets available in the shops. The world of the internet can be dangerous if it is not used safely. CAROLE PRESTON, the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board Manager, highlights some of the dangers of the internet and urges parents to be vigilant when their children are on-line.

Helping your child to stay safe online

BEING online and using the internet can feel just like being in the real world – your child can chat to people, play games and share pictures.

There are some great people on the internet, but there are also some people who use the internet for the wrong reasons.

Some people pretend to be much younger than they really are in order to talk to children and make friends with them.

They might start off by being nice, but then say nasty things, or start talking about things that make children feel uncomfortable or out of their depth, or they may even ask children to do things they do not want to do.

This is not acceptable. If this is happening to your child or to someone they know – please tell someone. Here is some advice you can pass on to your children:

How can you keep safe on the internet?

When you are chatting online,

avoid giving personal details that could help a stranger to find you. Do not tell people your last name, the name of your school, or where you live and hang out.

Protect your information.

Check to see if the site has a friends list that lets you control who can see the information on your profile or blog. Only accept people you know and trust as friends. If you do not use these privacy settings, anyone can see your details.

Never arrange to meet up with people.

Never get together with someone you meet online, in a chat room or on a blog if you have never met them in “the real world”. You do not know who they really are and people can pretend to be anyone and any age online.

Think before you put any pictures online.

What is uploaded to the internet can be downloaded by anyone and passed around or posted

online pretty much forever. Avoid posting photos that allow people to identify you. Avoid posting images of yourself which are suggestive. Think about how you would feel if it were seen by your family or friends. If you would not want any of those people to see this photo – then don’t put it on the internet for the world to see.

Check comments on your profile regularly.

Do not respond to mean or embarrassing comments. If possible, block out any offensive people from commenting further. Be honest about your age. Talk to your parents about sites that will be suitable to your age group.

How to report concerns.

If someone you are talking to online says something that makes you feel upset, worried or uncomfortable, or if they ask you to do things you do not want to do, you must do something about it.



If this happens, you must remember that it is not your fault. Always tell another adult you feel you can trust.

Save any messages that have

upset you so that you can show the person who you tell. If you don’t feel that you can tell an adult, there are other people that can help you.

For further information, advice and support visit the Government’s CEOPS website (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) where there is lots of useful information for you, and provides you with a way to report what is happening to you. The link is www.ceop.police.uk

You can follow the link to the ChildLine website where you

can access advice and support www.childline.org.uk

Parents can also get information and advice from www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

Children can contact national helplines: NSPCC Helpline: 0808 800 5000 ChildLine: 0800 1111

In an emergency you can dial 999 and ask for the police.



Community has role to play in tackling growing problem

PEOPLE living and working in Stoke-on-Trent are being urged to help professionals tackle the growing problem of child sexual exploitation. This horrific form of child abuse can involve any young person from any background and can happen to both boys and girls.

Signs include – but are not limited to – unexplained gifts such as clothes and mobile phones, having money that they would not usually have, going missing from home and school, hanging out with groups of older people, drug and alcohol misuse and repeat sexually transmitted infections.

Jackie Carnell, Independent Chairperson of Stoke-on-Trent



www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

Safeguarding Children Board, said: “Child sexual exploitation continues to be a concern locally as well as nationally.

“Professionals are working hard to tackle exploitation and raise awareness but we really do rely on the community to work with us.

“Information on potential

abuse can be crucial in making sure action is taken as soon as possible in order to prevent a concern becoming a crisis and a child or young person becoming abused and exploited.”

Here are some helpful numbers:

Base 58: 01782 286862

Savana: 01782 221005

Family Information Service

Hub: 01782 232200

Advice and Referral Team:

01782 235100

In an emergency you can

dial 999 and ask for the

police.

Staff at hotels and B&Bs urged to be vigilant about child sexual exploitation

HOTELS and bed and breakfasts across Stoke-on-Trent are being warned about child sexual exploitation taking place on their premises in the run up to Christmas and New Year.

The city’s Safeguarding Children Board is alerting proprietors, managers and staff about the possible exploitation or trafficking of girls and boys,

often for sexual purposes.

Board Manager Carole Preston said: “At busy times of the year such as this, it can be difficult for staff to notice some of the key signs.

“So we are asking them to make extra effort and be vigilant.”

Staff are being asked to be extra aware of:

- Unaccompanied children and young people loitering as if waiting to meet someone.
- Repeat visits by young people with different adults.
- Repeat guests visiting with different young people.
- Older adults coercing or encouraging young people to drink alcohol.
- Adults making regular room

bookings and clearly meeting different young people.

- Suspicious signs in rooms or restricted access to the room.
- Young girls made up or dressed to look significantly older.
- Any signs of physical abuse.

Carole added: “We also want people working in the leisure, tourism and hospitality sectors

– people like club and bar staff and taxi drivers, for example – to be extra vigilant as well.”

For further information about child sexual exploitation or child trafficking, please visit www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk

M&S catch JET to fill vacancies

MARKS & Spencer teamed up with the recruitment and training programme managed by the city council to fill 250 job vacancies.

The retail giant was referred to Jobs Enterprise & Training (JET) as it prepared to open its new store in Wolstanton.

It based its recruitment team at The Store in Hanley – a retail skills academy where JET helps candidates prepare for job interviews.

During the process, JET supported jobseekers to fill out online applications.

JET Employment Broker Kelly Tomlinson said: "This was the first time we'd worked in partnership like this and it went really well.

"Marks & Spencer were based at The Store pretty much full time at the start of the recruitment process as they ran information sessions. We were able to book in candidates and support them throughout.

"It worked really well because they felt comfortable in what is a friendly and welcoming environment so they were able to perform better at interview. This has really showcased what can be achieved so we're hoping to get other employers involved in the future."

Employers are increasingly looking to make sure that they employ the best and most able person for the job and seeing a recent English or Maths qualification on a CV reassures employers that they have someone committed to developing themselves.

Store Manager Ricky Horner said: "Thank you so much for your support JET."

Kath Reynolds, Adult Learning Team Manager at the city council, said:

"English and Maths are the crucial skills that employers are looking for when appointing staff to any job.

"Maths may not seem important if you want a cleaning job but it is vital if you are mixing cleaning fluids that you understand ratios.

"It is also important that you can read and understand the label on the bottle you are using.

"If you left school with no qualifications and now find yourself looking for a job, English and Maths Functional Skills qualifications can be achieved in as little as six weeks through the Adult and Community Learning service."

Please phone 01782 234775 or email adult.learning@stoke.gov.uk for more information.



JET Employment Broker Kelly Tomlinson in discussion with Stefan Heard, Section Manager at the new £40 million Marks & Spencer store in Wolstanton.

Jobs and growth

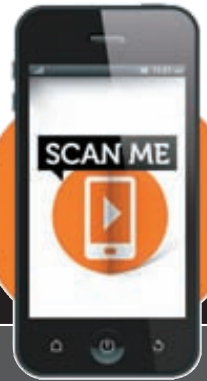
PART-TIME & SHORT COURSES FOR ADULTS

We have an exciting range of courses for adults starting soon!

We offer courses in a range of subjects:

- Recreational courses from sewing to Spanish
- Short courses in subjects including computers, counselling & crafts
- Professional courses to aid career development
- University-level courses

Courses run throughout the week at a range of times to fit in with your work and family commitments.



Bring this advert to life!

Follow the instructions below:

1. Download the FREE 'NULC AR' App.
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For a full list of courses please visit www.nulc.ac.uk, call 01782 254254 or email info@nulc.ac.uk Ref: Our City.

NULC
Newcastle-under-Lyme College

Special support available to help with housing costs

PEOPLE struggling with housing costs can apply for special support.

To qualify for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) residents will already be receiving housing benefit or Universal Credit including a housing element towards rental liability.

If they find they need further help with rent, rent in advance, rent deposits or removal costs, a DHP might be the way forward. Applicants need to show that they genuinely require further financial assistance with their housing costs.

The payment is funded by the Government and the city council takes into account special circumstances which make it difficult for householders to pay their rent. An application for DHP is also treated as a request for a Council Tax Hardship Fund payment.

When assessing people's eligibility the city council take into account all their circumstances including debts, expenditure on non-essential items, other benefits entitlement, steps taken to move to a more affordable home or whether applicants are fleeing domestic violence.

Call 01782 232982 for further advice or to make an application. It is also possible to apply online for Discretionary Housing Payment and Council Tax Hardship Relief at stoke.gov.uk/benefits

Supporting people



HERE TO HELP: Benefit Assessor Ashley Bradbury advises a resident on an application for a discretionary housing payment at Stoke's One Stop Shop in the local centre.

Ambition for the future – there's nothing wrong with it

By City Council Chief Executive

John van de Laarschot



YOUNG people in this city are working hard to improve their lives. Education results are improving dramatically. Kids I meet are telling me that they are ambitious, they want to do well. They are refusing to be held back by the perceptions of failure and negativity which have blighted this city in the past.

It's the spirit of achievement and ambition that is really changing this city. It's the belief that things can change for the better that is driving this city forward. People are what success is all about.

I have heard people say we are too focused on business and jobs. We spend too much time working to boost the economy and not enough money helping local people. They say we should be less ambitious and be more realistic.

However, you may not realise that we do spend almost two thirds of the funding we receive on just these people-focused activities, on social care, on housing, on supporting communities. The council remains as committed as ever to supporting the vulnerable in our society.

A couple of years ago I joined a group of young people abseiling down the outside of the YMCA in the city centre. Many of them were children in care or care leavers. They don't let little obstacles stand in their way! I was impressed with their determination. These are people who are taking control of their own lives despite all the difficulties they have faced.

This year I will be joining another group on stage at the New Victoria Theatre in their very own fundraising pantomime.

Every ticket sold helps to buy a Christmas present for young people leaving care. We have 570 children in care in the city, living with foster carers and in small group homes. The number of Foster Carers is going up thanks to a concerted campaign (see page 21). Plus we have been leading the way nationally in allowing children to stay with their foster families after they are 18.

This approach to helping them move gently into independence has been recognised nationally as best practice. We are leading the way.

We are one of the best communities in the country in helping children in care achieve their full educational potential. This year ten of our young people have gone onto to University. We provide them with an extra £5,000 bursary to help them make the most of their studies. These children are the future of this city. If we encourage and support their ambitions they will make us all proud.

You can't improve people's quality of life if you don't help them to develop the skills they need to develop their potential and the positive attitude they need to succeed in life. The same applies to the city as a whole. We have to grow our horizons both as a city and as individuals. We can't just turn our backs on the realities of a more competitive world and close the door. We have to seize every opportunity to grow and develop.

That's exactly why this city has ambitions to grow and prosper. It's why we want to squeeze the maximum benefits from HS2, making the connections to new opportunities. We want to grow the city to become one of the UK's leading city economies, plugged into the national success story. We will be one of the UK's powerhouse cities.

So in the pantomime spirit – let's nurture those golden eggs! What's good for the goose is good for the gander; and the whole flock. By supporting individual growth and opportunity we are growing a big city success story too. It's not a fairy tale – it's happening.



WILD THING: Oliver Peach-Birchall, 5 from Longton, meets a two-year-old West African dwarf crocodile brought to the library by exotic zoo presenter Sam Jones.

Libraries an open book on huge range of services

FROM exotic zoo sessions to lending books the City Library Service offer a huge and diverse range of services. Through a great selection of books and fun events libraries encourage children and families to read together. Community Librarians also visit communities and schools and welcome class visits into libraries.

Working with adults, the service runs reading groups for people who have not had the opportunity to access books and reading. These include groups for adults with learning disabilities, and adults who are improving their literacy skills.

Through specialist reading for health groups and working with volunteers libraries bring people together who feel isolated due to age or health issues to enjoy the love of reading.

Janet Thursfield, Strategic Manager for Libraries and Archives, said: "In addition, we deliver work clubs and support for jobseekers. This has included nearly 4,000 people visiting a library for job search support since February 2014, 257 one-to-one Employment Support sessions delivered since March and 452 one-to-one IT support sessions delivered by volunteer ICT buddies."

Janet added that the city's library management system had recently been upgraded. She said: "This is the first step towards launching a new interactive library catalogue which will also be home to our fantastic online resources, such as e-books, e-magazines and talking books, as well as library news and events and the place for books and reading in the city."

Reader feedback to shape future issues of magazine

READERS have had their say on *Our City* magazine through last issue's Reader Feedback competition.

Suggestions for new articles include more focus on local events, a history and heritage page and stories featuring teenagers and elderly residents.

There is also a call for city council job advertisements to be published, more competitions and a spotlight on a different town or area of the city each issue.

The majority of people (72 per cent) said they felt more informed about city council services after reading the magazine and 93 per cent of people stated they would recommend *Our City* to someone else to read. More than one in three people said they would like to be involved in a focus group looking at communications in the city.

Most readers think the length of articles is just right (93 per cent) with the majority thinking the language and tone used in the articles is very good (39 per cent) or good (49 per cent).

Additionally, 70 per cent of people said they had read the whole of the last two issues rather than just one or two articles and identified news and information about council services among the most useful sections of the magazine.

We value the views of everyone who

responded and we're looking to set up a focus group to involve the public in shaping the magazine and our communications overall.

All the feedback received will be used to help the council communicate more effectively with residents.

● Four readers who took part in the feedback competition have each won a £25 shopping voucher after their names were drawn from the hat. They are A. Fisher of Hartshill; T Silvester of Longton; M Barrigas of Meir and S Burrell Duet of Norton.



Charles Aked visits the City Central Library with his granddaughter Mollie to read the Autumn issue of *Our City*. Inset, the summer issue featuring pupils from New Ford Primary School, Smallthorne, who planted poppy seeds to mark the centenary of the First World War.

GAME OVER

DRINK DRIVING is a criminal offence

WHAT DRINK DRIVING COULD COST YOU:

- Your Job
- A driving ban of at least 12 months
- An endorsement of your driving licence for 11 years
- A criminal record
- Insurance will increase significantly - some insurers will not offer any cover!

If you get caught drink driving the consequences listed are the minimum that will happen to you. You may also be liable to a fine of up to £5,000 and up to 6 months in prison. The morning after, don't rush to get behind the wheel. You may feel fine but you could still be over the legal alcohol limit or unfit to drive!

www.staffssaferroads.co.uk/gameover

KNOW A CHEAT IN YOUR STREET?

Do you know what a fraudster looks like?

We need your help to find out!

Every year, thousands of pounds of your money is stolen by cheaters - money that should be used to improve your local community.

TENANCY INSURANCE COUNCIL TAX BLUE BADGE SOCIAL CARE

FRAUD

Don't let them get away

Call us on 01782 236800 or report fraud online at stoke.gov.uk/reportfraud

stoke.gov.uk

Mandate **stoke on trent**

Smithfield scheme is right on schedule

BUILDERS Laing O'Rourke and their sub contractors are on schedule to complete the first phase of the £55 million Smithfield development formerly known as the Central Business District by spring next year.

Internal fits are now being carried out at the two buildings set to be occupied by the city council around next summer.

Public realm and landscaping work is also planned now the five-storey buildings have been glazed – one of them with distinctive coloured honeycomb-shaped glass.

Developer Genr8 has already launched a marketing campaign to let two ground floor units in one of the buildings.

The project to create 1,250,000 square feet of office, shops and

leisure space is also about job creation, training opportunities and apprenticeships.

Nearly half the suppliers and sub contractors on site are from the Stoke-on-Trent area.

Mike Smith, Partner at Genr8 Developments, said: "It's fantastic to see the vision for Smithfield coming to fruition.

"Smithfield is an ambitious project which will play a huge part in the regeneration of Stoke-on-Trent.

"These two buildings represent the high quality standards that the development will continue to deliver over the coming years, providing a massive boost to the economic regeneration of the area.

"We look forward to seeing them in occupation over the coming months and announcing further phases of the development in the near future."



Smithfield Two with its distinctive coloured honeycomb-shaped glazing. Below right, sections of the honeycomb glass open outwards to let in air.



The stylish Smithfield One building.



High quality City Centre landscaping moves on to next phase

THE next stage of public realm improvements is underway to transform Stoke-on-Trent and create a City Centre fit for the 21st Century.

With Phase One and Two complete, Phase Three is now focusing on the area from the top of Piccadilly down to the new Smithfield development.

The work includes high-quality paving, seating and lighting and will create a clear pedestrian link between the main shopping area and Smithfield, including the

Cultural Quarter and its shops, restaurants and theatres. We worked closely with the RNIB, Guide Dogs UK and Action For Blind People in developing the improvement works.

Trees are also being planted to further enhance the area – all part of the public realm programme being funded by the city council and the Department for Communities and Local Government through the West Midlands European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Phase Three work will also be carried out at the Broad Street junction as well as parts of Cheapside, Bethesda Street and Warner Street and should be completed by autumn next year.

A total of £11.55 million will have been invested over the three phases to support existing businesses, attract fresh inward investment and create a much better environment to encourage visitors to spend more time in the city.

Open space in the City Centre is being upgraded to transform the appearance of the city and provide an inspirational series of linked spaces and streets that can accommodate events and festivals in a safe, accessible and attractive environment.

Work on Phases One and Two centred on Percy Street, Tontine Street, Albion Street, Albion Square, Old Hall Street, Parliament Square and Lichfield Street. Though complete, there are plans to install a sculpture in Albion Square which should become a focal point and meeting place for visitors.



Landscaping work is underway in Piccadilly.

A great place to live



Goldenhill resident Mary Bloor, aged 78, makes the most of the new seating area in Albion Square.

Grant boosts green travel at charity resource centre

EMployees at a charity resource centre are saving time and money thanks to the city council's Travel Plan Grant Scheme.

VAST – a charity providing services and support to voluntary and community groups, charities and social enterprises in Staffordshire – was awarded £3,000 and installed a shower, changing facilities and a

bike rack for use by all 16 tenants and visitors to The Dudson Centre in Hope Street, Hanley.

Jackie Wheeler, Facilities Manager for The Dudson Centre, said: "It's great to be able to give our tenants and all their visitors a choice of a cheaper, greener and healthier way of travelling to and from the workplace. We are extremely thankful to Stoke-on-Trent City Council for awarding us this grant and we are proud to have these facilities within our centre that not only benefit tenants and visitors but the city as a whole."

The centre has a café and new Chef Ian Woodhouse has been cycling to work and making good use of the facilities. He said: "It's great having the facilities at the centre. It is so much easier to cycle rather than drive through the city. It's a real time saver."

The Travel Plan Grant Scheme aims to help make Stoke-on-Trent a greener, healthier place to live and

work, by supporting local businesses and organisations to carry out sustainable travel initiatives enabling employees to cut travel costs and get to work faster.

Funding of up to £5,000 is available until March next year for schemes which may include buying pool bikes, installing covered and secure cycle storage, showers or changing facilities and can even fund the delivery of cycle training and bike maintenance clinics.

Sarah Hollinshead, city council Business Engagement Officer for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, said: "Whether a company is looking to improve their environmental credentials, encourage a healthier, happier workforce or simply save money on travel and transport costs, I would encourage them to get in touch and make a bid."



Chef Ian Woodhouse parks his bike at the new rack outside The Dudson Centre.



Peter Caine, a Graphic Designer for VAST, by the new shower.

For more information on the scheme, call 01782 232164, email travel.smart@stoke.gov.uk or visit www.travelsmartns.co.uk/travel-plan-grants

Travel Smart

Be bright, be seen, be safe

As winter arrives, the mornings and afternoons get darker. This can mean that it's not as easy to make yourself seen when you or your family are out and about. Here are some top Travel Smart tips to ensure you all stay safe on your journey – whether you're walking or cycling.

Top tips for looking after yourself

- 1
 If you're out and about when it's dark, wear reflective gear to make sure you can be seen in car headlights. Reflective vests, sashes or wrist bands work well.
- 2
 Brightly coloured or fluorescent clothing shows up well in daylight and at dusk when you're walking or cycling.
- 3
 Don't forget to accessorise. Even small items such as clip-on reflectors, armbands and stickers on your outfit or bags are a great way to improve your visibility.
- 4
 When cycling, remember that it's the law to have clean, working lights at night as well as a rear reflector. You could also fit spoke reflectors for added visibility - and don't forget to wear a helmet too.
- 5
 Remember to always cross the road in a safe place and use the Green Cross Code. Always choose well-lit, safe routes. Plan your journey with walkit.com/stoke-on-trent

LOOK OUT

FOR EACH OTHER

We're calling on drivers to protect people on foot and bike by following these three simple steps:

- slow down to 20mph in residential areas
- look longer and take it slow at junctions and bends
- give people plenty of room

Instructions

Download our free app to your smartphone or tablet and bring this advert to life!

- Download the **TravelSmart AR** app from the App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android).
- Open the app, point your device at the Travel Smart logo (bottom left) and wait for the surprise.
- Double tap for a full-screen.

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Mandate to change



Banksie and Nello granted freedom accolade

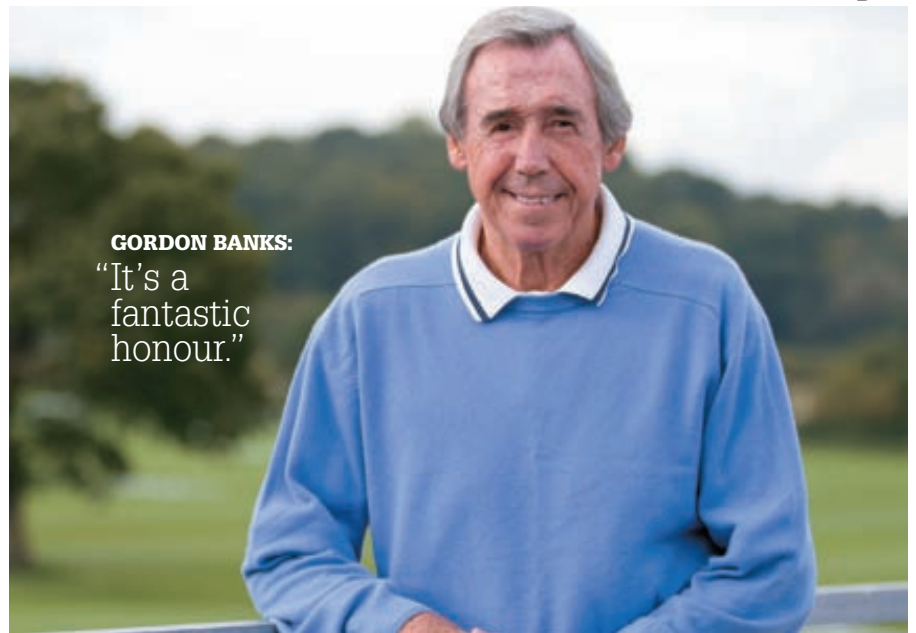
TWO Stoke City legends have spoken of their honour at each being awarded the Freedom of Stoke-on-Trent by the city council.

Councillors unanimously backed World Cup winning goalkeeper Gordon Banks and former Potters kitman Neil 'Nello' Baldwin to receive the accolade.

Gordon, who was made President of Stoke City after the death of Sir Stanley Matthews in 2000, said: "It's a fantastic honour."

Banksie's 1970 save from Brazilian star Pele's powerful header at the Mexico World Cup finals is still widely regarded as the best parry in soccer history.

A YouTube clip of the save, showing Gordon leaping across the goal to palm the



GORDON BANKS:

"It's a fantastic honour."

goal bound ball round the post, has been viewed over 1.4 million times.

Nello, immortalised in the TV film *Marvellous*,

which told the story of his life, from circus clown to former Stoke City boss Lou Macari's kit man and mascot, was nominated for his "heart-warming, inspirational perspective on life."

Indeed, people were so moved by the touching, yet humorous tale, that over 6,000 people joined a Facebook page urging the Government to give Nello a knighthood. When he learned of the Freedom of the City honour, he said simply: "It doesn't get much better than this."

They were nominated for the city's highest honour at a meeting of the full council.

Councillor Adrian Knapper proposed the award for Gordon who played 192 times for Stoke.

He helped the club win the League Cup in 1972 – seven years after lifting the Jules Rimet trophy for England.

His career was tragically cut short when he lost the sight in one eye after a road accident.

Councillor Knapper said Gordon Banks was one of the greatest footballing heroes the country had ever known.

He added: "Stoke-on-Trent is the city he has felt the strongest affinity for. He is one of the city's most famous adopted sons and still lives locally today."

"He has been with us through thick and thin and by granting the Freedom of the City to Gordon Banks OBE, the city council is recognising his outstanding contribution to city life."

Councillor Paul Breeze, in nominating Nello, told his fellow councillors: "*Marvellous* was a wonderful true story of a wonderful man. Neil encapsulates what should be universal ideals for humanity – be nice, be friendly and choose to be happy."

"We should all be very proud to give Nello this honour and to have him come from our city."

As for Nello, he is hoping his run of good fortune will rub off on his favourite football club. As he told *The Guardian's* TV critic: "Last year I got an honorary degree from Keele University. This year, a film about my life. Who knows, maybe next year something nice will happen to Stoke City."

NEIL 'NELLO' BALDWIN:

"It doesn't get much better than this."



Thousands of services keep the city moving every day

SCHOOLS, highways and waste collection are among the city council's most high profile services. But beyond the frontline and the highly visible work carried out by council employees there are a thousand and one other services without which the city would grind to a halt.

From alleyways and allotments through to walks and wedding venues, the list of things the council is responsible for is seemingly endless.

And while at first glance some of the services might seem unimportant, they all have a vital role to play in the life of the community of Stoke-on-Trent.

For example, the council operates an Empty Homes Team which aims to bring long-term empty homes back into use to improve the standard of housing in the city and to reinvigorate communities.

There is also a Licensing Team

responsible for regulating and licensing a wide range of activities including taxis and private hire vehicles, street collections, lotteries, raffles and scrap metal dealers.

The owners and operators of taxis and private hire vehicles have to take them to a special testing station – operated by the city council – to obtain their MoT certificates. And where would the city be without its cemeteries – there are nine – and its crematorium, all of which are operated by the council to provide a smooth and sensitive service at a time when families need it most.

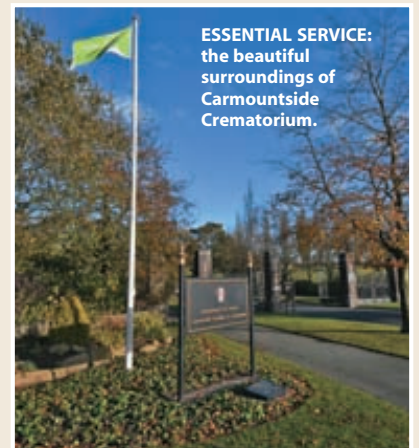
How would someone register a birth or a death without the city council's Registration Service based at Hanley Town Hall? How would people get rid of rats, fleas and wasp nests without the council's pest control service?

And how would city residents find out about things like road safety, No Cold Calling Zones, climate change issues and even where they can walk or enjoy a spot of fishing within the city's boundaries without the information services operated by the council?

"People tend to notice the big, frontline services like highways, education and social services, but they don't see all the hard work that goes on behind the scenes to make everything else in the city run smoothly," said Assistant Chief Executive Charlie Stewart. "All those services have an important place within the community and a vital role to play in the lives of the people of Stoke-on-Trent."

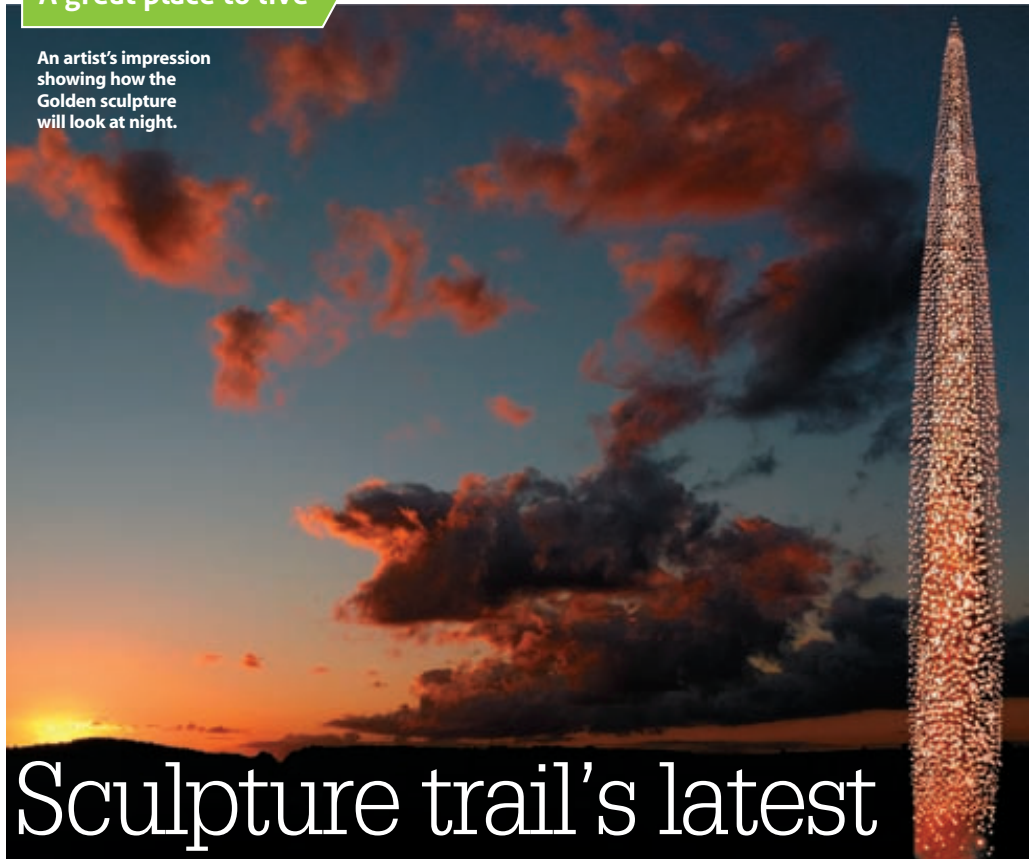
Full details of all services offered by the city council can be found on the authority's website at stoke.gov.uk where an A-Z listing is available.

ESSENTIAL SERVICE:
the beautiful surroundings of Carmounside Crematorium.



A great place to live

An artist's impression showing how the Golden sculpture will look at night.



Sculpture trail's latest addition is pure gold

A new addition to the skyline of Stoke-on-Trent – and to the city's acclaimed sculpture trail – is set to attract admiring glances from residents and visitors alike.

Golden, a 20 metre tall steel column, will be erected in the heart of the Chatterley Valley in Tunstall. The title of the piece reflects the flames which previously lit the night sky during the heyday of the Goldendale ironworks which locals referred to as "the flame that never dies".

During a site visit, award-winning artist Wolfgang Buttress, who is creating Golden, found a piece of iron from the old works which has a remarkable resemblance to a human heart. This will be suspended in the interior of the artwork to represent the beating heart of the community.

Covered in more than 1,000

hand-blown glass prisms, Golden will sparkle with light during the day and – thanks to internal LED lights – shine out across the Chatterley Valley at night.

Each of the glass prisms will contain a memory or wish written on handmade paper by hundreds of people in the local community.

City council Culture and Events Manager Paul Bailey said: "Golden will be a fantastic addition to the sculpture trail in Stoke-on-Trent which earlier this year was judged one of the top 10 cities in the world to visit for arts and culture walks.

"It will bring the total number of pieces in the sculpture trail to 40. The trail is a collection of important, imaginative and fascinating public art sculptures, all with a unique story to tell."

The sculpture trail is divided into three distinct subject areas with nine

pieces depicting Great People – including Sir Stanley Matthews and Spitfire designer R J Mitchell – and 11 reflecting Local History such as Man of Steel, Angel of Victory and Unearthed, a magnificent piece of artwork dedicated to unearthing the story of Stoke-on-Trent's relationship with the Czech village of Lidice where hundreds of people were massacred by the Nazis in 1942.

The Stanley Matthews statue at the Britannia Stadium was voted one of the top 10 pieces of public art by the Independent newspaper.

A further 20 pieces come under the heading of Inspirational and include Golden, the Tunstall Shard, Tree Stories and The Pace of Recovery.

Full information about the sculpture trail – including a detailed map – is available at www.stokesculpturetrail.co.uk

Where in the City?

Win a digital camera in photo competition

FOR the chance to win a Samsung digital camera have a go at our photo competition called *Where in the City?* Below are three pictures showing close-up images of parts of three buildings in Stoke-on-Trent which are all playing a part in regeneration.

All you have to do is name the buildings – and send your answers with your name, address and contact telephone number by email to ourcity@stoke.gov.uk or post to:

Where in the City competition, FREEPOST Our City

Deadline for entries is Friday 9 January. To give a little help in identifying the buildings, there is a clue with each photo. The winner of a digital camera for last issue's competition was Sandra Clarke of Meir Park.



This state-of-the-art facility is just the tonic.



A great community facility in the north of the city.



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Number of people out of work decreases

THE number of people in Stoke-on-Trent claiming Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) has fallen by more than 2,700 in the last year, outstripping the UK's overall reduction rate, new figures have revealed. Data provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that the JSA claimant count in the city has reduced by 2,744 since October last year – a reduction of 38.6 per cent.

This compares with the national average decrease of 29.9 per cent over this period, while the West

Midlands regional reduction in JSA claimants was 28.8 per cent.

The decline in joblessness also means that Stoke-on-Trent's claimant rate of 2.7 per cent has now dropped below the regional average for the first time since 2007.

The number of people in the city claiming JSA now stands at 4,371, which is 42 per cent lower than the peak of 9,056 which the city reached in January 2010, at the height of the economic downturn. Earlier this year, Stoke-on-Trent was ranked among the top four UK

cities for job creation in 2013 by the Centre for Cities think tank, and the third fastest growing economic area according to accountancy firm UHY Hacker Young.

Council Leader Councillor Mohammed Pervez said: "These figures from the ONS show the council really is delivering on its promise to secure more jobs and investment for the city. Since we transformed our economic strategy through Mandate for Change, unemployment in the city has almost halved."



My City, My Say
Working with you for a better Stoke-on-Trent

COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN ACTION...
Fenpark Hilltop Allotments Secretary Tony Williams takes part in a community tidyup in Fenton.

People have say on **FUTURE OF CITY**

Feedback from 1200 people received at 50 events held across the city is helping to shape future priorities for the city.

Over 300 people attended events at community venues while at least 930 filled in an online questionnaire.

Residents praised community spirit, heritage and parks and gardens but urged the city council to tackle jobs and prosperity, dirty streets and safety.

People who took part were very positive about being involved in their local area; half were already involved and a further twenty percent said they were really keen to do more in their community.

At a special feedback event at the King's Hall local people, officers from council and other organisations in the city worked together to identify ways in which they could work together to address these issues. This feedback has helped to inform a 30-year vision, called 'Renaissance' of Stoke-on-Trent as an economic northern powerhouse.

City Renaissance plans to slash unemployment, create more jobs and new homes, provide better education and training and opportunities for all in a city with a vibrant and diverse heart. It sees a new core city – a world capital of ceramics – with enhanced transport links and digital infrastructure and:

- A population of 750,000.
- 110,000 new jobs.
- Economic growth of £4.3 billion.
- 1,900 new businesses being created each year.

- 85,000 new homes with a significant proportion worth over £250,000.
- 100 per cent of working age people with qualifications and skills appropriate to their chosen career.
- Children's' educational performance in the top quarter in the country.
- Resilient families with better life chances.
- Crime and antisocial behaviour below the national average.

Council Leader Councillor Mohammed Pervez said: "Stoke-on-Trent is one of the fastest growing cities in the UK and is undergoing economic renaissance. We want to realise Stoke-on-Trent's full potential for future generations by growing into a new, vibrant and prosperous core city. "But the city council can't do this alone.

"We need to work together with a host of talented and passionate people who live and work here to better understand the city's needs and shape its future direction, to build on our strengths and help the city grow and prosper. It has been really helpful for us to hear first-hand what people think."

The city council is now working closely with partnership organisations like the universities, neighbouring councils and the emergency services as well as voluntary, community and faith groups, to develop three pilot forums across the city. These will look at how the voice of the community can influence services to meet local needs.



Early Years Musician Penny Barfield makes music with Christchurch school pupils Layla May, Leon, Kaitlyn and Ryleigh, all three years old.

Music funtime extended thanks to £30,000 grant

THE City Music Service has received a grant to the tune of £30,000 to extend its popular Soundpots project for young children.

The money, which has been awarded through the national Youth Music grants programme, will extend the project, which is delivered in partnership with Make Some Noise, until March 2016.

It also enables the delivery of weekly musical activities at 16 more venues and further training sessions for Early Years practitioners and teachers.

Soundpots engages with children up to the age of five at schools and nurseries across the city.

In schools, the project team work with small groups of around 10 pupils for half an hour each week, encouraging language development and social skills through carefully chosen musical activities and engaging resources.

In private day nurseries the musician often becomes more a part of the team for a half day a week, mentoring staff and

working in a more play-based way with smaller groups of children or one to one, as well as with larger groups.

Soundpots Co-ordinator Penny Barfield said: "Encouraging and supporting staff is an important part of the Soundpots project.

"At least one member of staff comes in to each session, and it has been brilliant to hear them recounting how they have tried out activities with the whole class, or perhaps gone over activities again during the week with the smaller group.

"In many cases, the Soundpots children have become leaders in class, helping to teach songs and activities to the whole class."

Louise Holland, Reception class teacher at St Teresa's Catholic Academy in Trent Vale, said: "I honestly believe I have achieved much more than I thought I would and the children that have been going to the Soundpots sessions have grown in confidence so much. The transformation is quite often unbelievable."



A green oasis at the heart of the city... Burslem's restored park.

Improving homes to boost health

HEALTH and wellbeing issues linked to pockets of poor housing are being tackled in a new initiative starting in the Portland Street area.

Under the Safe and Sound Homes (SASH) scheme, teams are visiting households to offer free checks for

problems like damp and mould, poor heating, draughty windows, fire and trip hazards and problems with electrics.

The SASH Coordinator will also speak to local residents individually to help identify any health or support needs they might have in order to benefit their health and wellbeing. This could range from money and

debt advice, help with accessing grants to help with fuel poverty to finding a doctor or dentist.

The area is already undergoing a raft of environmental improvements as part of the council's £1 houses project.

The link between housing conditions and health is well proven and SASH will enable the city council to work closely with residents and homeowners, including private landlords, to tackle issues caused by substandard accommodation.

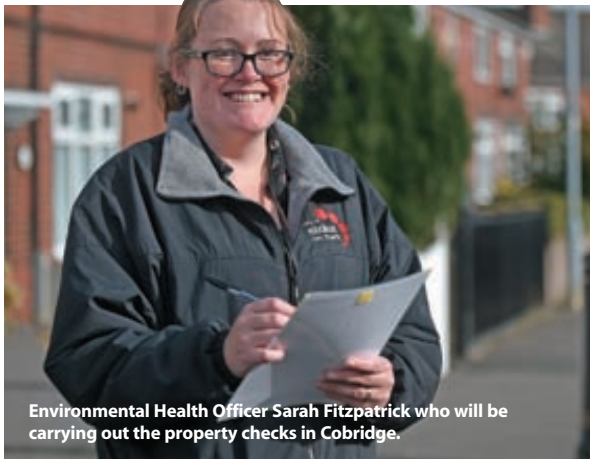
As well as offering free housing inspections for tenants, the city council can also help homeowners secure affordable finance and advice so they can carry out necessary repairs that will improve their wellbeing or that of their tenants.

At the start of the £1 houses project the authority pledged to improve the area for everyone living there and city council officials are confident that is what is happening.

The response from residents has been very positive and demonstrates that there is a vibrant and engaged community



Safe and Sound Homes Coordinator Jordan Hitchin with leaflets explaining how the scheme works.



Environmental Health Officer Sarah Fitzpatrick who will be carrying out the property checks in Cobridge.

there and that people are ready and willing to make change happen.

Safe and Sound Homes Coordinator Jordan Hitchin said: "My role will be to visit households in the area to ask residents about the quality of their housing as well as their health needs.

"I can offer advice and

guidance about local services that can help many different groups of people, including advice for the over 55s, information about free early education and help with careers and employment."

Funded by the city council's Public Health Directorate, the SASH team can be contacted on 01782 232786.

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Domestic violence and abuse, one of the most harmful of crimes, continues to be actively addressed by all agencies within the Stoke-on-Trent Domestic Abuse Partnership, including the city council, domestic abuse charity ARCH, and statutory and voluntary sector partners. Here, *Our City* tells the harrowing story of one victim as others are urged to come forward.

Seek help before the festive period

PEOPLE tempted to remain in abusive and violent domestic relationships over the festive period are being urged to think twice and seek help.

The advice comes from ARCH, the Stoke-on-Trent based charity organisation dedicated to keeping victims of domestic violence safe.

Part of the Staffordshire Housing Group, the charity delivers a range of services across Staffordshire and Cheshire East including education programmes, referrals to counselling services and help lines operated by volunteers.

Teams visit victims in Accident and Emergency and train medical staff to ask the right questions.

They also operate a support service for men and women to help them stay in their homes safely and four 24-hour staffed refuges for women and children, one of which is in Stoke.

The charity works with perpetrators through a 30-week programme designed to raise their awareness about the effects of their behaviour and help them change it.

Tackling domestic violence needs a multi-agency response, bringing together the police, social care, education, probation and voluntary sectors – so ARCH trains a wide range of partner agencies.

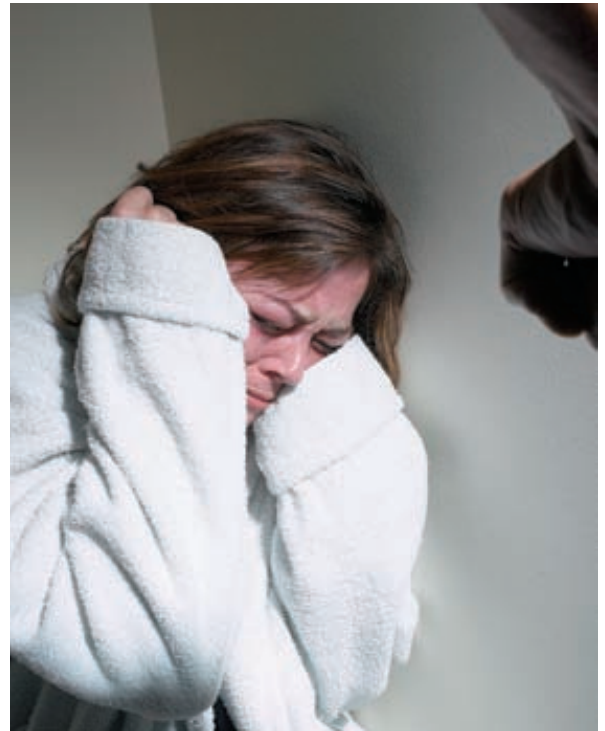
It also provides recovery, confidence and self-esteem raising programmes at the Sunrise Centre.

Wendy Wainwright, Head of Domestic Violence Services at ARCH, said: “As Christmas approaches, many victims will stay in an abusive relationship to try and give their children a happy time and hope things will be different.

“However, this is unlikely to be the case because domestic violence usually escalates over time and tensions around finance and increased use of alcohol will only exacerbate an abusive situation.

“Anyone needing information and support should ring us at Arch. We are here to help and support you.”

Call ARCH on 01782 222421 or the helpline on 01782 205500.



Domestic abuse victim Marie was physically and emotionally abused by her husband for more than 20 years but managed to break the cycle with the support of all agencies involved and is now rebuilding her life. Here, she tells her story...

Charming at first – then he started to make changes

“WHEN I met him he was charming and a bit of a bad boy. He moved in and we had a baby but he started to make changes from the beginning. Things like I didn’t need make up or to wear short skirts. As time went on he became increasingly moody and stopped me working.

I can’t remember exactly when he started to hit me, I think it was when he was having one of his affairs and I found out. As time went on he isolated me and stopped me going out. He drove my friends away by making them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome.

He instilled fear in me like I had never felt before, I would dread being hit if I didn’t comply to his needs/demands and his constant jibes about my weight and appearance.

I had no confidence or self-esteem left. He made sure that I knew if I left him he would harm family members. We all learned to just comply with his

demands – we were all his slaves. I knew I had to get away before he killed me. He attacked me again but the police were called and he was arrested and later sent to prison.

I have been beaten, mentally tortured, imprisoned, deprived of sleep and I have been assaulted on countless occasions but I am now in a new relationship and very happy.

My family is helping me to rebuild my life. I suffer from post traumatic stress disorder – however I am strong and confident. I have had loads of support from the police, social services housing, Arch and the Sunrise Centre.

I have completed the Freedom programme, the Domestic Violence Recovery Toolkit and an accredited volunteers programme.

I am a volunteer now and co-facilitate programmes. I am doing loads of courses and hope that I can help women who are going through what I did.

Spotlight on

OUR CITY'S RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Dedicated group leads big community clean up

THE Pinnox Junction Residents' Association, in Tunstall, responded to a city-wide call from the council for residents to help clean up their neighbourhoods.

Eight members went to Pinnox Street litter picking during a Cleaner and Greener event during which the council appealed to community groups and businesses to take part.

The local authority provided equipment and sent out trucks to

collect rubbish across Stoke-on-Trent and the association was keen to play a leading role in tidying up the environment.

Chairman Charles Edmonds said: "We are passionate about keeping our area clean and tidy. We do litter picking on a weekly basis but the Cleaner and Greener event was a great chance for us to make even more of an impact."

"We took the lead in our area, working with the council's

environmental team and doing a thorough litter pick throughout the street and in the back alleys. We also pointed out fly tipping sites in our area so that they could be dealt with."

● There are residents' associations all over Stoke-on-Trent. For more details about joining one or setting up a community group, contact the city council's Tenant Involvement Team on 01782 235916 or email tenantinvolvementteam@stoke.gov.uk

Busy road safer after campaign

ONE of the busiest streets in the city is getting a pelican crossing – thanks to a campaign by the local residents' association.

Traffic safety measures are being introduced on a stretch of Keelings Road near Northwood Broom Community School.

The initiative comes two years after the Northwood Residents' Association began working with the city council, the school and local police to improve conditions for pedestrians.

The issue was first flagged up by resident Malcolm Hughes whose daughter had experienced some near misses.

He spoke to a Highways Agency official during an association meeting and a subsequent traffic survey established that Keelings Road was one of the busiest in Stoke-on-Trent.

"Since then the road has got busier and busier," said association Chairman John Birch.

"The much-needed pelican crossing will

benefit not only the children at the school but also people using the nearby shops and post office."

Once the crossing is installed, the Association is planning to set up a memorial bench with a plaque to remember Malcolm Hughes, who has sadly died since.

The Northwood Residents' Association, working with Birches Head Residents' Association, has also been successful in securing £20,000 funding for sports sessions for young people at Northwood Stadium.

The two-year project has been match-funded by Stoke City's Kicks initiative and the StreetGames programme run by the city council. Young people aged between 12 and 19 are coached in football at Kicks sessions and are provided with a

Making a difference



Chair of the Northwood Residents' Association John Birch, left, and Treasurer Alan Wrench, at Northwood Broom Primary School, where a new crossing is being installed.

range of sporting activities including basketball and cricket by StreetGames.

John Birch said: "We decided to go for more funding after the success of a pilot scheme two years ago."

"The new grants are a good result for local youngsters who are supervised by

trained personnel during the sessions." New members are always welcomed at Northwood Residents' Association. John said: "Our members get a real chance to make things happen in their area. We give them a voice through having access to local councillors."



Tunstall North Residents' Association Minute Secretary Sue Viggers, right, and Chairman Dennis Viggers, left, show the smart water property marking technology with Treasurer John Bannister on Parsonage Road.

Water smart way to boost home security

MEMBERS of Tunstall North Residents' Association have come up with a smart idea to ensure people in their area experience increased security in their homes.

The association has used part of a £1,000 People Power grant from Staffordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner to purchase 100 SmartWater forensic marking kits.

SmartWater is a property marking system that residents and businesses can use to protectively tag their property as a crime prevention measure.

An invisible liquid is applied to possessions, acting as a DNA-style fingerprint which links owners with their property and criminals to the crime scene.

The association discussed the

idea of using the system with Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Ellis when he visited recently.

So far it has purchased 100 kits, which are being sold to residents in its 900-property area for £10. All proceeds are re-invested into the scheme.

Chairman Dennis Viggers said: "We are very grateful for the funding which has allowed us to launch this crime prevention initiative."

"Anyone inside our catchment area who has not been approached with the idea and wishes to purchase a kit is invited to attend one of our meetings which take place on the second Thursday of each month at 7.30pm at Tunstall Reform Club."

Mandate for Change... Stoke-on-Trent: a great place to do business

City Council Leader Councillor Mohammed Pervez welcomes hundreds of delegates to the GrowNorthStaffs event.



Hundreds sign up to drive business

MORE than 200 delegates attended a major networking event designed to accelerate business growth in the city.

Staged at the King's Hall, businesses were welcomed by Council Leader Councillor Mohammed Pervez before key note addresses from the council's Chief Executive John van de Laarschot and Simon Burton, the founder of the Great British Entrepreneur Awards.

The third annual GrowNorthStaffs event featured one-minute pitches from a diverse range of businesses and organisations explaining their

business. Subjects covered during the pitches ranged from venture capital investment, UK Trade and Investment help for exporters, to keeping it local, advice on how to grow and find new customers and how young people can develop their business acumen.

Twenty business booths were also showcased to help promote local projects and programmes to businesses, which will help them on the fast track to success.

This included Keele University Science and Business Park, Staffordshire Business Environment Network (SBEN), the council's Mandate for Change, the Business

Innovation Centre and PM Training.

Useful networking opportunities had been organised and feedback was that it was an "excellent event, extremely well represented by senior members of the council."

Ramona Hirschi, Managing Director of Fairtrade products distributor Little Trove, said she found the event extremely useful. She added: "It's always good to see what sort of vision the city's leaders have for Stoke-on-Trent and how we can both gain from and contribute to it."

For more information and to see the event's presentations, go to stoke.gov.uk/grownorthstaffs and follow the links.



Funk-Soul Media founder Ruairi Cahill, left, with Dylan Banks, aged 16, from Fenton who took part in one of his video projects.

Support has star role in film firm's success

FILMMAKER Ruairi Cahill is focused on using his skills to build his business and jumped at the chance to network at GrowNorthStaffs.

The 23-year-old from Ireland graduated with a film production degree from Staffordshire University earlier this year and decided to stay in the city as he launched Funk-Soul Media – a small video production company.

Ruairi said: "GrowNorthStaffs was very valuable, a lifeline to get exposure and to get to meet people. I was very nervous making my one-minute pitch but I did get leads from it, which I'm following up. It was very successful.

"I've learned life lessons in this city I couldn't have got anywhere else so I'm staying."

Commissions undertaken by Ruairi so far include a community project with Stoke City Football Club to tell the story of the National Citizen Service and a corporate promotional film for Delta Surgical, an independent distributor of medical and surgical products.

Bake-off take-off is recipe for progress

BAKING queen Liz Wroe turned to her passion for cakes when she lost her sales and marketing job two years ago and her new business was born.

She now trades from her Werrington home as Miss Liz – making themed celebration cakes and selling sock animal craft kits.

To grow her business, the 32-year-old attended the GrowNorthStaffs event and is now following up a number of leads.

She said: "I've been passionate about baking forever and used to bake for

friends and my colleagues at work. They always said I should go into business for myself.

"When I lost my job that's what I did. I now trade online and at craft fairs with the support of my family.

"The Prince's Trust invited me to the GrowNorthStaffs event and it was a really, really useful way to network.

"It was also useful finding out about the council's plans to grow the city. It was great to talk to people and I got a few leads. The Prince's Trust Tomorrow store has ordered 40 of my sock monkey kits."

Liz Wroe has made a business out of baking.



Mandate for Change... Stoke-on-Trent: a great place to do business



Sponge decorator Melanie Hulme adds blue glaze to the Emma Bridgewater Union Jack line.

Economic vision and s businesses to t

EXTENSIVE business support is offered through city council sponsored services as the authority's Mandate for Change drives economic growth in Stoke-on-Trent.

From start-ups to existing companies, local authority experts work with partners to provide loans, mentoring, competitive intelligence, space at enterprise centres, recruitment and training consultancy.

Packages are available to help businesses grow and thrive:

- Finance is available through the Stoke-on-Trent Business Loan Fund, jointly funded by the council and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Loan amounts depend on the business plan and are also available to new businesses in their initial phase. Call 01782 367148 or email apply@yesup.co.uk
- Loans can range from £10,000 to £50,000. Call 0845 313 8410, email enquiries@bcs.org.uk
- Government-backed low interest Start-Up Loans typically of around £4,500, delivered by partner Youth Enterprise, are available for those who want to be their own boss and launch their own enterprise.
- The council manages Enterprise Centres

for small businesses in Longton, Shelton, Burslem and Chatterley Whitfield. They offer communal facilities and shared resources like meeting rooms and high-speed internet. Call 01782 233233 for more information.

- Reports offering information on trends, gaps in a market, buyers and suppliers in the supply chain and the best place to find customers are available to small and medium sized companies from the council. Call 01782 238327 or email business.growth@stoke.gov.uk
- Mentoring to help firms overcome difficulties and improve practice is partially funded by the city council and delivered free of charge by Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce. Call 01782 213929.
- Jobs Enterprise & Training (JET) is the council-managed recruitment and training consultancy that helps firms find a trained workforce. Call 01782 233530.
- Supply Chain opportunities are available through Make It Your Business – an online web portal delivered by the council in partnership with Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce.

It is free to register and provides a range of business information and email alerts with contract opportunities. Call 01782 234552, email myyourbusiness@stoke.gov.uk or visit myyourbusiness.stoke.gov.uk

Team's sustained approach attracts glowing praise

OFFICERS driving business success in the city scooped three awards at two prestigious events.

The city council's Economic Development Team's work on Mandate for Change won Best Small Business Friendly Programme or Campaign at the regional Federation of Small Businesses Awards.

Judges recognised the authority's sustained approach to business support including an innovative Start-Up competition to foster local entrepreneurship, inward investment and mentoring as well as affordable finance and grant aid through the Regional Growth Fund.

Two commendations were also handed to the council at the national Enterprising Britain Awards in London. The first commendation, Promoting

Entrepreneurial Spirit, was awarded for the team's work supporting new business start-ups and existing businesses.

A partnership drive involving pottery manufacturer Emma Bridgewater and former Trade and Investment Minister Lord Green to drive up exports saw the council commended in the Support for Export section.

Council Leader Councillor Mohammed Pervez said: "The team has helped local firms to tap into millions of pounds of grant funding to create and secure jobs."

"The award and commendations reflect the hard work that has gone into building up our business support service and show that we are well on the way to making Stoke-on-Trent the place to bring and grow business."



Backing business

Still time to enter for awards

ENTRIES are still being taken for the Sentinel Business Awards – although the closing date is Friday 19 December.

There are 10 categories and awards honouring apprentices, businesses, entrepreneurs, innovation, training, science and technology, growth and international trade.

Judging takes place early in



2015. To enter any of the categories visit www.stokesentinel.co.uk and complete the application.

Mandate for Change... Stoke-on-Trent: a great place to do business

Support packages help thrive and grow

St James Enterprise Centre, Longton, is one of six across the city offering facilities to for use by local businesses.



Alastair Machin, Managing Director of Chaffinch Document, inside one of the company storage centres.

Alastair boxes clever with document storage

AMBITIOUS entrepreneur Alastair Machin launched his Stoke-on-Trent based secure document storage business just three years ago and already has his eye on the prospect of further expansion with city council support.

The 27-year-old Managing Director of Chaffinch Document has built a strong relationship with the city council teams to access financial and mentoring support.

Alastair secured funding to expand his storage facilities and hire an extra member of staff.

He has also improved his financial management knowledge and business acumen through the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce mentoring sessions, which are partially funded by the council.

Chaffinch Document has grown substantially since 2011 with turnover doubling each financial year since then.

With three employees, the firm now stores up to 30,000 archive boxes at triple-locked premises on Festival Park and at the North

Staffs Business Park in Tunstall.

Alastair said: "The support of the council teams has been very useful. It's always a challenge for smaller businesses to access finance so you need to know how and where to go.

"As for the mentoring, I've been able to access expertise that a business of our size wouldn't necessarily be able to afford and that's given me a different perspective.

"I've learned a lot and it's given me a wider base of knowledge. It's good to know there is a support structure in place locally to grow businesses in the city.

"We hope to expand and take on further clients. I'm local and I'm passionate about the idea that Stoke-on-Trent should have as many opportunities to progress as possible.

"The city council is providing the best possible access to experts so I will remain in touch with their teams and want to develop that relationship.

"Last time I expanded I took on one new member of staff, next time I hope it's two."



Artisan potter Anita Harris with some of her pieces.

Popular pottery launched with redundancy money

FROM redundancy to a growing global fan base – Anita Harris really is flying the flag in Stoke-on-Trent for the small, artisan potter.

Based in Longton, Anita, her son Peter and business partner Samantha Johnson produce highly original hand-made designs using their signature reactive glazes.

Stoke City Football Club has commissioned pieces and Henry Sandon from the BBC's Antiques Roadshow has supported event days at the firm's new shop in the intu Potteries Shopping Centre.

Anita, who moved to the city in 2002 after a 10-year stint as Head of Design at Poole Pottery in Dorset, said: "I secured a position as a designer for Moorcroft's sister company Cobridge Stoneware but was made redundant when it closed, so I used my redundancy money to set up Anita Harris Pottery four years ago.

"It hasn't been easy, but we've managed to keep going because we have a great following of local people as well as collectors from Australia, Canada, the USA and many more countries.

"The city council has always been very supportive of what we do and has come to us for special one-off presentation pieces like the vase we made to present to Sir Bradley Wiggins when he won the Stoke leg of the Tour of Britain.

"It's hard work and you need to be passionate and dedicated.

"But with the support of the city council, the intu Potteries Shopping Centre, Stoke City and our many friends and collectors, we're going from strength to strength.

"We hope one day to set on an apprentice to pass our skills on to because otherwise the techniques we use will gradually die."

True grit all set for **ICY BLAST**

GRITTERS are on stand-by in Stoke-on-Trent to help road users battle through the icy blast of winter.

Seven gritting vehicles and a 4X4 vehicle with a trailer are poised to spread grit salt to

prevent ice forming and clear snow in a bid to keep traffic moving safely.

They are able to draw on 2,800 tonnes of grit salt which have been stockpiled at various designated sites, as well as top-up supplies which salt mines have agreed to make available in the event of extremely harsh weather conditions.

The current availability of salt allows for the council gritters to go out 120 times in frost conditions and 30 times in snow conditions during the winter.

A full-time night shift is backed up by on-call drivers, drawn from various areas within the city council's existing workforce.

The decision to send out the gritters is taken by a qualified officer and is based on daily information provided from a



READY TO ROLL:
LGV Driver Dave Ferguson with the gritting trucks.



STOCKPILE:
Place Reactive Technician Nick Cartlidge and Data Collection Engineer Emily Robinson with the mountain of grit at Cromer Road.

number of sources including specialist weather prediction software linked to an onsite weather station, which predicts likely road surface and air temperatures.

Around 260km of roads are treated each time the gritters go into action. These include major roads and regular and frequent bus routes together with some

infrequent bus routes which are part of the main network.

Attention is also given to access roads for emergency services including police, ambulance stations and hospitals.

The council also makes trips to fill the 400 self-help grit bins strategically placed around the city for use on roads and footpaths.

The grit in these bins is

intended solely for use on the public highway and not on private driveways etc.

Please call 01782 237061 to request that a bin be refilled. For more information go to stoke.gov.uk/gritting and stay up-to-date with issues affecting travel in the local area by following @stokehighways on Twitter.

Plan to build realistic WW1 trench exhibit at museum

A replica trench has been built next to The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery as the city commemorates the centenary of the outbreak of World War One.

A full-scale section of trench complete with dugout will offer museum visitors an atmospheric, thought-provoking

understanding of some of the conditions experienced by soldiers on the battlefields.

Engagement days are planned for both school-age young learners and adults, which would combine activities and displays with science demonstrations. Working in partnership with the Forensic departments at Staffordshire and Keele Universities, a CSI-style event on 25 April 2015 examines how scientific advances changed the art of warfare.

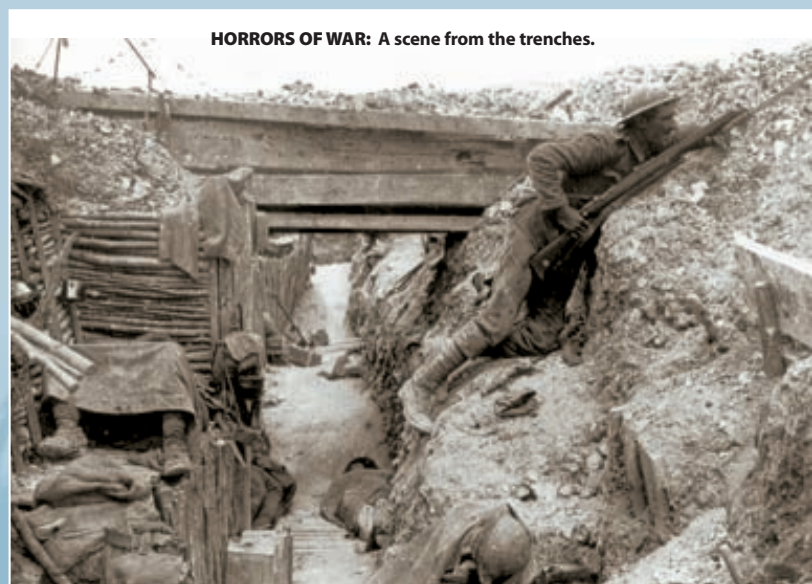
Visitors will be able to learn about artillery shells, how poison gas was made and even get to try their hand at making periscopes. Science students from both Staffordshire and Keele Universities are set to help deliver the interactive activities and demonstrations.

Melanie Firman, the council's museum-based Audience Development Officer, said: "We're really excited about our plans for the semi-permanent trench exhibition.

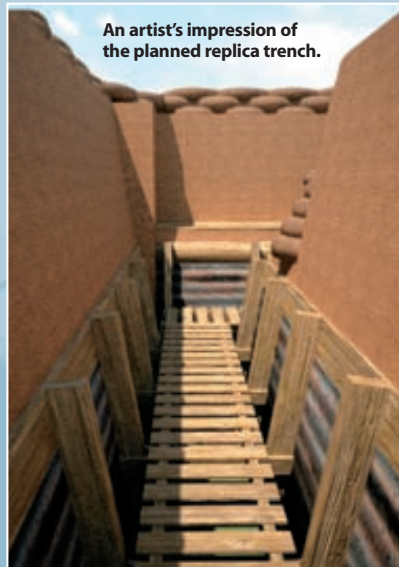
"It'll really bring to life the horrors of the war and show people what soldiers had to endure."

The trench is just the latest in a packed programme of commemorative projects and events taking place at the museum through until 2018.

World War One items are on display until 26 April 2015 in an exhibition called Echoes of War, which focuses on the contribution that Stoke-on-Trent made



HORRORS OF WAR: A scene from the trenches.



An artist's impression of the planned replica trench.

to the war effort through its infirmiry. Costumes and uniforms will be used during Women and the Great War on 22 March next year in a presentation highlighting the catastrophic impact of the war on the Home Front.

For a full events listing and more information on the commemoration of the First World War centenary, please visit stokemuseums.org.uk and stoke.gov.uk/firstworldwar

More people are ready to volunteer

MORE and more people across Stoke-on-Trent would happily volunteer for the benefit of their community according to the findings of the My City, My Say public consultation.

Of nearly a thousand people who filled in questionnaires, 20 per cent said they would like to offer their time, skills and resources in the future.

Volunteers already play a key role in helping to keep the wheels turning at libraries, museums, schools, adult and youth services and parks across the city.

They carry out clean-ups and park revamp projects, give administration support and even help people take part in sport.

Many will help neighbours this winter if bad weather sets in with things like shopping and making sure they are safe.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are carried out for some roles and the council offers induction training and support as volunteers pick up valuable

experience, which can often improve their CVs and enhance their job prospects.

Valued volunteers support adults with learning difficulties to enjoy activities like bowling, shopping, the cinema and courses. Disability awareness training is offered for those taking part.

For more information contact Kerry Summerfield on 01782 236174 or email valuedvolunteers@stoke.gov.uk

There are volunteering opportunities to work with young people aged 10-17 who are affected by the criminal justice system – either bringing them face-to-face with a victim at a Youth Offender Panel or acting as an appropriate adult during police questioning.

Enhanced DBS checks are carried out and training offered. Contact Sheetal Mistry on 01782 238830 for more information or email sheetal.mistry@stoke.gov.uk

Sports volunteers help deliver activities at leisure centres across the city so to get involved call 01782 236930 or email

Volunteer Sara Ponting working with the arachnid collection at the museum.



sportsdevelopment.activities@stoke.gov.uk

Schools also take volunteers in support roles that are subject to DBS checks, medical clearance and references.

For opportunities contact the headteacher at a school directly.

Sara is city's very own Spiderwoman

SPIDER lover Sara Ponting is in her element as a volunteer at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery where she is helping to catalogue the arachnid collection.

The 23-year-old University of Edinburgh zoology graduate can spend up to two days a week in the basement working with hundreds of dead specimens in boxes and others in jars of alcohol.

Currently studying for her Masters degree in Invertebrate Ecology and Conservation at Staffordshire University, Sara's job is to organise the collection into families, re-label and identify specimens when a label is missing. She said: "I love spiders and have two at home, a pink salmon Goliath bird-eating tarantula called Rasputina and Anna, a Chilean rose tarantula. They eat crickets and cockroaches.

"I'm a passionate arachnologist and want to work in conservation so the experience I'm getting at the museum is incredibly useful. I'm able to study specimens, use equipment I wouldn't normally get to and it's helping build my experience.

"It's a lovely place to work. All the volunteers have their specialities and have made me feel really welcome."

Sara has a long track record of giving her time as a volunteer having worked in her native Scotland for Scottish Exotic Animal Rescue as well as the Lothian Amphibian and Reptile group.

She has also worked as a laboratory assistant and in a shop for the charity Shelter UK. "I'd encourage anyone thinking about volunteering to go for it – it's a great way to expand your hobbies and experience," she said.



Volunteer Hoard Host Mark Higginson with nine-year-old Izaak Liddall who had the chance to try on an Anglo Saxon costume during his visit to the museum.

Hosts tell the story of the Staffordshire Hoard

HOSTS are being recruited to help showcase the incredible display of Staffordshire Hoard artefacts at The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery.

The volunteers would join an existing team of enthusiasts who chat to visitors about the find, new research and Anglo Saxon life in general.

Interpretation Officer Cathy Shingler, who helps organise museum volunteers, said: "Our Hoard Hosts have been a particular success because they can tell its story better than panels or labels ever could."

The museum wants to hear from prospective Hoard Hosts who could

offer an afternoon or a full day. There are other volunteering opportunities including administration and at the Gladstone Pottery Museum.

To find out more, call Cathy on 01782 232323 or email cathy.shingler@stoke.gov.uk

Community Safety Officer Mick Warrilow with the eye-catching concept car.



Hi-tech car simulates crash impact

A hi-tech concept car will be driving home potentially life-saving messages to young people in Stoke-on-Trent.

The VF4 Ford Focus ST has been kitted out with state-of-the-art equipment which simulates the impact of a car crash. It aims to reduce the number of incidents on the city's roads by educating young people on the possible risks they face if they fail to drive safely and sensibly.

The vehicle will be visiting schools and colleges next year and students will be invited to

sit inside it while a DVD is played.

The actors featured make a variety of mistakes, including taking a call on a mobile phone while driving and not wearing seatbelts, which result in a road traffic collision.

On impact, the car drops dramatically as though it has been in a collision and smoke fills the interior. Blue flashing lights are then activated, indicating the arrival of the emergency services.

Mick Warrilow, Community Safety Officer for the north, said: "The car is an amazing educational tool as the young people are able to experience the sights, sounds and smells of a road traffic collision without

actually being involved in a real-life incident.

"It is a very dramatic simulation which will stay in the minds of participants for a long time – with the aim being to dramatically reduce the number of young people who will actually go through it in reality.

"The experience will be backed up by a hard-hitting presentation which includes facts and figures relating specifically to our target group.

"These include safety messages around the use of drink and drugs while driving, speeding, using mobile phones and not wearing seatbelts, all of which can have life-threatening consequences."



Right, the hi-tech simulation equipment in the car's boot.



Ron and Kath Hughes discuss fire risks and fire alarm systems with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Technician Paul Bragg.

WINTER FIRE SAFETY AT HOME

Prevent a potentially devastating fire in your home this winter by following our safety advice

Cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never leave cooking unattended. Look when you cook! • Keep clothing and tea towels away from the cooker • Keep electrical leads away from the cooker and water • If a pan catches fire, get out, stay out and call 999 • Avoid distractions when cooking • Don't cook after drinking alcohol or late at night
Electrical Fire Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn off any electrical equipment at the socket • Don't leave the house or go to bed if your washing machine or tumble dryer is in use • Clean the filter in your tumble dryer regularly to remove fluff • Don't overload any adapter or plug socket • Don't put electric heaters near curtains or furniture
Standalone Heaters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switch heaters off if you're not in the room or are going to bed • Keep heaters at least one metre away from fabric and furniture and never use them to dry clothes • Only use gas and paraffin heaters in well-ventilated areas • We advise against using bio-ethanol and gel fuel burners but if you do use them it is essential that safety warnings and manufacturer's instructions are followed

Test your smoke alarm every week!



Home fire risk check is vital

STAFFORDSHIRE Fire and Rescue Service is urging people to make sure their elderly relatives, friends and neighbours are as safe as possible from fire this Christmas.

Ron and Kath Hughes from Bentilee have received their free Home Fire Risk Check from the service – one of the best ways to ensure protection in the home.

Kath said: "My granddaughter booked us in for a check, we'd had one at our old address but she thought it was important for us to have another one in our new property.

"Ron is hard of hearing and so a normal smoke alarm wouldn't wake him when he takes his hearing aid out. So we've a specialist smoke alarm for him, which includes a vibrating pad under his pillow, which would wake him if there were a fire at night.

"We certainly feel much safer now – the visit is free so there's no reason why people shouldn't have one. We'd definitely recommend it."

Prevention Lead for Stoke-on-Trent

Donna Broadhead said: "There have been over 150 fires involving elderly people in the city in the past five years and already this year we have had two older ladies sadly die.

"If you have elderly parents, grandparents, neighbours or friends we'd urge you to book them in for a free Home Fire Risk Check with us – it will give them, and you peace of mind."

A Home Fire Risk Check involves a firefighter or a technician visiting your home to give fire safety advice and fit equipment such as smoke alarms to ensure you are safer in your home.

To book a check, call FREEPHONE 0800 0241 999.

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing and require a specialist alarm a referral will be made during this visit to get this equipment fitted during a separate visit.

For more information visit:



Staffs Fire and Rescue @staffsfire

www.staffordshirefire.gov.uk



Carers give life, time, love and stability

WATCHING their own girls making friends and playing with foster children in the street inspired Sue and David Howe to take up fostering themselves.

That was around 17 years ago and the couple from Talke, who are registered with the city council, have since fostered seven youngsters – the latest being a 13-year-old boy.

Fostering is about looking after other people's children when they are unable to remain with their own families.

With three grown up daughters, six grandchildren aged 14 years to 12 months and an extended family of foster children who keep in touch, life in the Howe household is never dull.

Sue, who has just turned 60, said: "Fostering was something we'd always wanted to do but we waited until our girls were a little older and the time was right."

"It was a bit difficult to start with and a real steep learning

curve. There was a little trepidation before our first foster child arrived but it was fine. She was 10 years old and stayed 12 weeks.

"Our second was only supposed to be with us two weeks but stayed eight years and our latest long term child is fantastic.

"Fostering to us is about giving time, life, love and stability. We laugh at times and cry at times and I'd encourage anyone else considering fostering to do it."

Dave, a 59-year-old manager at a distribution centre, said: "I'd call fostering a calling. It's a way to give to other families what you give to your own family.

"I'm always pleased to see how our foster children get on plus it's nice to be able to make a difference."

Foster care provides a safe, secure and stable environment for children and young people. The city council works with children, young people and their families to help them, where possible, to return home or move on to a permanent and secure placement.

Foster carers can look after



Sue and David Howe with their two-year-old collie Guy.

children and young people for a few days, weeks, months or years, depending on their needs.

As well as mid-and longer term needs, carers are also needed for short break fostering for children with disabilities, to provide much-needed support for their families.

Stoke-on-Trent Fostering Service offers an allowance to care for the child, local 24-hour support along with comprehensive, high quality

training. More foster carers are always needed in Stoke-on-Trent where the council has a policy of trying to keep as many children in the city as possible so they can maintain links with their family and friends.

If you are thinking about fostering, or simply want some more information, why not contact the Fostering Duty Team on 01782 234555 to receive an information pack and talk to one of their friendly advisors.

New hub to benefit all carers

CARERS will benefit from a reshaping of services that aims to offer increased support to them and their families.

The city council is looking to create an integrated Carers' Hub in conjunction with county-wide partners. The move would see the authority and Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) jointly commission the hub in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and Staffordshire CCGs. One lead provider would be expected to work with others for the provision of the service across the whole of the county – offering consistency in delivery and improved outcomes for carers through a person centred approach.

The Carers' Hub model has been developed on the back of considerable consultation with carers, current services and professionals. City council officers have also looked at other areas where this type of provision is in operation, to help shape it.

The hub will offer a single point of contact and act as a host for a number of services including advice and guidance, carers' breaks, volunteering opportunities and crisis prevention.

£2,000 in festive market vouchers up for grabs

MARKETS across Stoke-on-Trent are running an easy to enter draw in the run up to Christmas with prizes worth £2,000 up for grabs.

First prize will be £1,000 in cash with a further eight runners up each receiving market vouchers worth £125. Forms are available at all markets with a closing date for the draw of 24 December.

Traders are pulling out all the stops this year as shoppers are encouraged to try the many fabulous indoor and outdoor stalls near them.

More and more younger people are starting to shop in markets as younger entrepreneurs start businesses selling goods not easily found on the High Street.

Success stories include Andrea and Gary Wall who started Wall Flowers at Longton Market with the help of Business Enterprise Support and Gemma Hall who opened her Flaunt It boutique at Hanley Market following the tragic loss of three babies. Gemma now gives 20 per cent of her profits to SANDS – the stillbirth and neo-natal death charity.

Julia Smith, from Stoke-on-Trent Markets, said: "Our city markets are truly vibrant and our knowledgeable traders work really hard to offer great value products and fantastic customer service so why not give them a try."

"Where else could you get a key cut, speak to an equine vet, have a guitar lesson or have your shoes re-heeled whilst doing your Christmas shopping?"

To find out about special festive events and offers, visit the Stoke-on-Trent Markets Facebook page which now has over 3,000 likes.



Sneyd Green Resident Iris Wedgwood looks at the Cards Galore stall in Hanley Indoor Market.

Handling dozens of queries every day, Paul Pennell is one of around 40 people who staff the phones at the city council Customer Access Centre. He spoke to *Our City* about his job...

Supporting people



Helping people is a rewarding job

Astint at the local Citizens Advice Bureau stood 26-year-old Paul Pennell in good stead when he swapped to a new job as a Customer Service Advisor at the city council's Customer Access Centre just over a year ago.

Already used to dealing with a wide range of problems and inquiries, he found the move to providing answers to questions about city council services a relatively easy one to make.

"People call in with questions on just about everything and anything," he said. "We try to answer queries immediately if we can and we have access to a huge range of information on screen which we can refer to.

"We try very hard to provide the information people want so they don't have to call again. It's not often that we are stumped."

Many of the calls dealt with by Paul and his colleagues are about payments to the council, environmental issues and refuse collections. In the summer months there are also calls about pest control matters – dealing with wasps nests and other hazards.

Paul said: "We try to answer all calls as quickly as possible – as soon as a Customer Service Advisor is free they will pick up the next call.

"We don't like leaving people waiting. Occasionally you'll get someone who complains about having had to wait a long time for someone to pick up their call,

but it really doesn't happen very often and we have training so we can deal with people in the best way possible."

After a year in his role Paul still very much enjoys what he does. He added: "It's a really rewarding job. It's always nice when you can help someone – even with something quite small – and they go away happy."

The Customer Access Centre can be contacted on **01782 234234** and deals with queries about all services provided by the city council. Its busy staff handle around 7,500 calls each week as well as responding to emails which can be sent to **enquiries@stoke.gov.uk**

The centre operates from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday and from 9am-1pm on Saturdays.

Full details of all city council services can also be accessed on the city council website: stoke.gov.uk

READY TO TAKE YOUR CALL: Customer Service Advisor Paul Pennell.

Youth club teenagers go on a voyage of discovery



Onboard the *Queen Galadriel* in the North Sea are Youth Development Worker Andrew Johnston, left, and Youth Worker Libby Wilkinson, right at the back, with Bentilee Youth Club members, left to right, Emily Stevenson, Jessica Reynolds, Paige Tomkinson, Jack Finch and Kieran Downie.

A group of young people from Bentilee embarked on a voyage of discovery when they spent their half term holiday as crew on a tall ship.

The 14 to 16-year-olds – all members of Bentilee Youth Club – boarded the *Queen Galadriel*, a Baltic Trader-type vessel, on a five-day trip on the high seas.

Accompanied by three youth workers and joined by the ship's captain and three crew members, they cleaned, cooked and learned navigational skills as the sailing ship followed the North Sea coastline from Ipswich in Suffolk to Ramsgate in Kent.

Despite stormy conditions, they rose to the occasion and impressed their supervisors and the ship's seasoned crew.

City council Youth Development Worker Andrew Johnston said: "The idea of the trip was to instil a sense of responsibility and boost self esteem by taking the young people out of their comfort zone and seeing how they would cope with the challenge.

"They did fantastically well and their resilience and sense of achievement was nothing short of awesome.

"Despite the rough seas

and sometimes being asked to be out of bed at 3.30am to carry out their duties, no one moaned at all and the teamwork really came to the fore."

One of the youngsters, Paige Tomkinson, said: "I feel very lucky that I have had the chance to go on this sailing adventure, organised by the Youth workers at Bentilee Youth Club.

"We worked together as a team. Being in rough seas was horrible, but we got over it and faced each challenge together.

"I feel I have achieved something, it wasn't easy but it was so rewarding and I think I will be able to cope with challenge better in the future.

"When I got back home I missed everybody from the ship and now wish I could do it again, it was fantastic."

● **For more details about the activities laid on by Bentilee Youth Club call Andrew on 07717 714187 or email andrew.johnston@stoke.gov.uk**

Anyone wanting to get involved with their local youth club should contact the city council's youth services team by emailing youthteam@stoke.gov.uk

Tough line on fouling.. owners face £1,000 fine

DOG owners who fail to clear up after their pets or let them run loose in town centres, playgrounds and other areas face stiffer penalties as part of a tough new approach by the city council.

The warning comes after new Dog Control Orders were adopted across the city following widespread consultation with the community. The control orders – which came into force on 14 October – mean court fines of up to £1,000 can be handed out to dog owners who let their dogs off the lead in town centres, children's play areas, cemeteries, church yards and sports pitches.

And on-the-spot penalties for anyone failing to pick up dog mess deposited by their pet have been raised from £50 to £80 in a bid to encourage owners to keep the city's streets clean.

Public consultation earlier this year revealed strong support for the Dog Control Orders which mean the whole of the city is now covered by regulations requiring owners to clean up after their pets – and for dogs to be kept on the lead in designated areas. And in the case of fenced play areas dogs are now banned altogether.

Carol Gibbs, the council's Strategic Manager for Environment, Waste and Fleet City Renewal Services, said: "The city council is taking a hard line approach to dog fouling.

"Responsible dog owners have nothing to fear, but the irresponsible few who blight our communities need to change their behaviour or face prosecution."



Meir Resident Sylvia Sweetmore, aged 80, walking her Labrador Milo and, inset, behaving responsibly by cleaning up the pavement.



Environmental Crime Officer Chris Oldfield collects evidence at a flytipping scene in Hanley in a bid to identify the culprits.

Facts & Figures

IN 2010 the UK dog population was estimated to be 8 million, with dogs producing approximately 1,000 tonnes of excrement each day.

The biggest threat to public health from dog excrement is toxocarasis. Toxocarasis is an infection caused by the roundworm *toxocara canis*.

The eggs of the parasite can be found in soil or sand contaminated with faeces and if swallowed, result in infection that lasts between six and 24 months. Symptoms include eye disorders, aching, dizziness, nausea, asthma and, in extremely rare cases, seizures and fits. Almost 100 children each year pick up a serious eye infection from dog mess.

Children and adults can also get it on their shoes without realising it and walk it indoors.

Who Should Clean It Up?

Everyone walking a dog must clean up after it. No excuses. Always take a bag, close and tie it and dispose of the mess in either the red dog bins or any street litterbin provided by the council – otherwise put it in the bin at home. Remember, in most areas of Stoke-on-Trent it is a criminal offence not to clean up after your dog. Failure to "bag it and bin it" will run the risk of £50 on-the-spot fines or up to £1,000 if taken to court.

What if there is a problem with dog fouling in my area?

If you wish to report dog fouling issues in your area please phone 01782 234234.



Crime team expanded to boost city's successful clampdown on fly-tippers

STOKE-on-Trent City Council has expanded its team of Environmental Crime Officers who work outside normal hours in a bid to catch fly-tippers in the act.

It comes after the city council was praised by a national body for clamping down on people who dump rubbish illegally.

The Local Government Association (LGA) – which represents nearly 400 councils in England and Wales – singled out Stoke-on-Trent as a good example of a local authority which was taking firm action to deal with the problem.

The national body is calling for a shake-up of laws controlling illegal dumping of waste – which costs LGA member councils more than £36 million each year to clean up.

But it warned that current laws relating to fly-tipping were "unfit for purpose".

An LGA spokesman said: "Currently, councils can only take fly-tippers to court and this can be expensive and time-consuming – frequently involving lengthy investigations. Often councils are left out of pocket after legal action because

courts only award partial costs."

The LGA wants councils to be awarded full costs and to have the flexibility of issuing on-the-spot Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for some cases, rather than having to go to court. FPNs would be handed out for offences like dumping items, such as pieces of broken furniture, old televisions and mattresses.

Stoke-on-Trent's Cleansing and Environmental Enforcement Team Manager Nick Bentley said: "The council currently spends around £21,000 a month on dealing with fly-tipping across the city and everyone who pays Council Tax has to contribute towards that bill. Fly-tipping is simply irresponsible."

● **Fly tipping is illegal and dangerous. It ruins the appearance of a neighbourhood and can bring an area down. Residents are being urged to work with the city council by reporting fly-tipping. They can either fill in a form at stoke.gov.uk/envirocrime or phone officers on 01782 234234.**



Food bank volunteers Emily O'Brien and Keith Stubbs at Swan Bank Methodist Church in Burslem.

Fund available to help in times of most need

CRISIS support from Stoke-on-Trent City Council means people need not suffer in the event of a one-off or out of the ordinary emergency – especially over the festive period.

The Social Fund provides help all year round for those who are not able to meet an urgent need that poses a threat to health, safety or wellbeing in situations including flood, fire, an unexpected death or domestic abuse.

It could be they have no access to essential items like food or fuel, need travel expenses, risk being made homeless or are trying to prevent children being taken into care.

Community Planned Support is also available to help people re-settle, remain in the community or set up a home. Help is also there for those leaving an institution like hospital, prison, a residential home, a hostel or a refuge.

Help involves giving food vouchers and food bank referrals, clothing, electronic vouchers for gas and electricity top ups, white goods and furniture, resettlements packs, pots, pans and even bedding. To qualify for crisis help, people need to be over 16, live in Stoke-on-Trent, be entitled to public funds and be in immediate need.

To receive Community Planned Support, people must be claiming Employment Support Allowance, Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits or Pension Credit.

Support does not cover simply overspending and having no money left. No cash is given and no repayments are needed.

To apply, call 01782 238888 or visit stoke.gov.uk/money matters.

Volunteers were out and about during November as part of Lung Cancer Awareness Month, encouraging people to visit their GP if they had any of the symptoms of lung cancer. *Our City* spoke to one man who did just that – and survived...

Healthy lives



Cyril Lawton, who now volunteers with the Cancer Awareness Team, after winning a battle with the disease.

Living proof that checks can work

WHEN retired newsagent Cyril Lawton was told he had lung cancer he and his wife Janet were devastated.

Cyril was receiving treatment for a chest infection two years ago when his GP suggested he went to the University Hospital of North Staffordshire for further tests including chest X-rays and an MRI scan.

And it was the scan that revealed a growth in one of his lungs – which experts at the UHNS quickly identified as cancer.

“It was a real shock,” said Cyril, 83, of Nursery Avenue, Stockton Brook. “But my consultant told me they had caught it early and that as long as I had the tumour removed then I stood a good chance of survival. They took away part of the lung affected by the cancer and although I still go back to hospital every three months for a check up, so far everything has been fine and I’ve been really well.

“I’m very grateful for all the treatment and support I have had – it was fantastic from the word go. But my experience shows why it’s so important for people to get themselves checked if they have any symptoms which could suggest lung cancer.”

Cyril now volunteers with his local Cancer Awareness Team. On three mornings each month he helps man information stands at supermarkets and local health centres where he hands out cancer awareness leaflets and talks to people about the importance of getting themselves checked out if they have any of the symptoms of lung cancer.

“It’s my way of saying ‘thank you’ for the care I received,” said Cyril.

“Early diagnosis of cancer helps to save lives because the sooner treatment gets under way the better the chances of survival.”

For more information and advice visit the city council website at stoke.gov.uk/lungcancer

Early signs to stop big killer in its tracks

LUNG cancer is the UK’s biggest cancer killer. It is the most common cause of death from cancer for both men and women, claiming almost 35,000 lives a year.

Early detection of lung cancer makes it more treatable, so encouraging people to recognise symptoms and to see their doctor sooner, rather than later, could save lives.

Make an appointment to see the doctor immediately if any of the following symptoms occur:

- A cough which continues for more than three weeks.
- Any change in a long-term cough.
- Coughing up phlegm with blood in it.
- Feeling more out of breath than normal.
- Repeated chest infections.

- Feeling more tired than usual for some time.
- Losing weight for no obvious reason.
- An ache or pain in the chest or shoulder that has lasted some time.

Any of these could be an indication of lung cancer so do not delay. Make that appointment and remember – early diagnosis saves lives.

More free early years education available

MORE two-year-olds are benefiting from the city council's free early years education offer now that a former community centre in Cobridge has been re-opened as a nursery.

At least 33 children are already enrolled at the Old Rectory Kindergarten at Moorcroft Grange – all of them enjoying 15 hours a week as part of the council's £8 million Government backed scheme to transform the life chances of thousands of youngsters across the city.

The business in Bursley Road has been partially funded by the council and is the third nursery to be opened in the city since 2003 by Sheena and Stewart Reid.

Eight childcare staff have been employed so far and another seven could be hired depending on take up of places.

Not just a nursery, the transformed and refurbished space is also a community hub with a café, police post and training room. There are plans to offer adult education courses like English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and ICT.

Parents can enjoy coffee mornings as well as Zumba classes and the centre is even used as a changing facility by a Sunday football team.

Nursery Manager Kate Sutton said: "With a waiting list at our other nursery in Burslem, we knew there was demand in the area for places so more children are now benefiting as we meet their early years learning needs."

"Their parents are benefiting too as they spend time getting to know each other so it's helping build community spirit. The response from the community has been really positive."

Owner Sheena Reid said: "Our vision is to work with other agencies and professionals to provide classes and groups for parents and carers to attend whilst their child is accessing the quality childcare that we provide."



The nursery is a place where parents can get to know each other. Pictured having a chat are Emma Belcher, left, with her daughter Remy Louise and Kerry Shaw with her son Charlie James.



Some two-year-olds having fun at the Old Rectory Kindergarten are, left to right, Aayan Hasib, Riley Miller and Imran Asim.



Baby Room Assistant Megan Oakley with nine-month-old Sol Wood.



COVER PICTURE: Pictured at the Old Rectory Kindergarten are Saima Asghar with her daughters Anayah, aged 18 months, and Umaiza, aged three, nursery owner Sheena Reid and PCSO Jaz Mahil.

It's the best start for children – and parents benefit too

SINCE September this year, more than 2,000 eligible two-year-old children have been able to benefit from free early education available through quality approved child-minders, nurseries, pre-school playgroups and schools across Stoke-on-Trent.

The entitlement offers children up to 570 hours of free early education a year which is usually taken 15 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year, but the flexibility of the entitlement allows families to take less hours over more weeks if they prefer.

A family is eligible to receive early education for their child with

effect from the term following their second birthday if they receive one or more of the following:

- Income Support;
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance;
- Income based Jobseekers Allowance;
- Child Tax Credit and/or Working Tax Credit (and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 per year);

- Support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act;

- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit.

Additionally, a child can also benefit from free early education if they:

- Have a current statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care plan;
- Are entitled to Disability Living Allowance;

- Are looked after by the local authority;

- Have left the care of the local authority as a result of an adoption order, a special guardianship order or a residence order.

To ensure there are enough good quality two year old places available across the city, the city council has used funding made available by the Department for

Education to assist childcare providers in enhancing the quality of provision available, and build additional capacity where required.

As a result, there are more than 90 childcare providers offering funded places for two year olds across the city – visit stoke.gov.uk/fishdirectory to find out who offers early education near to you.

To make sure you and your family are not missing out, please visit stoke.gov.uk/beststart or call the Stoke-on-Trent Family Information Service Hub (FISH) on 01782 232200 for more information.

Park with care on school run

PEOPLE taking children to school during the winter months are being urged to ensure their journey is as safe as possible.

A council campaign which puts special emphasis on the need to park safely when dropping off or picking up youngsters is being well received by schools in the city.

The initiative is aimed at people who park in non-authorised spaces for their own convenience, without knowing that they are putting other people at risk.

The overall plan is to encourage behaviour change through re-education for those willing to change and enforcement for those who need a stronger

message. Meanwhile people on the winter school run are being issued with a number of "keep safe" pointers.

Reducing driving speed cuts the chances of skidding and increases stopping distance significantly.

Drivers should also make sure there is an adequate gap between their vehicle and the one ahead, stop regularly to clear windows and lights, and use dipped headlights when visibility is reduced.

To counteract the problems of walking in icy, snowy weather on the way to and from school people are advised to wear a bright scarf or a reflective item



Victoria Mirza and her eight-year-old son Isaac leave Willows Primary School, Penkull, following the 'keep safe' advice as they walk home.

of clothing so that they can be seen easily.

Best practice is to walk on pavements wherever possible but if school visitors need to go in the road they should move against the flow of the traffic and

keep close to the kerb.

People taking children to school in a pushchair or on foot and who are forced to walk in the road, should keep them as close to the kerb as possible.

Dressing in layers and wearing

boots with non-skid soles is also advisable.

If schools have to be closed because of bad weather conditions that information will be available online at

stoke.gov.uk/schoolclosures



Lyndon Durose, left, aged nine, and 10-year-old David Imobighe collect eggs.



Mitchell Durose, aged eight, feeds farm pigs Hollie, left, and Lilly.

Pupils have lessons down on school farm

LESSONS at a Meir primary school include studying nature "down on the farm". But there is no trip to the countryside involved – the Sandon Community Farm is in the grounds of the school itself.

The ground-breaking initiative at Sandon Primary Academy is the brainchild of Head Teacher Rachel Beckett.

The farm is a unique teaching environment where the youngsters aged between four and 11 can get to know Mediterranean miniature donkeys, pygmy goats, kune

pigs, chickens, rabbits and guinea pigs. They also help with the day-to-day running of the scheme which includes greenhouses, vegetable and wildlife gardens and a pond.

The farm is used on a daily basis to form cross-curricular links between maths and literacy and it also supports the general development of the children.

Teaching Assistant Jim "Farmer" Kiddle, who runs the farm and who used to work for Chester Zoo's education department, said: "The project

enables the children to reconnect with nature and it has behavioural as well as educational benefits.

"A wide variety of subjects can use it – for example, in Maths, the younger children will count the animals.

"The pupils feed and muck out the animals while learning about nature and the outdoors."

The farm is open for school visits and the gates are open to the local community during school hours. Local volunteers help with the day-to-day running.



Brody Burton, left, aged eight, and 10-year-old Ellie Bakserville feed farm donkeys Craig, left, and Damien.

Stoke-on-Trent streets to be named after World War One heroes



STOKE-ON-TRENT is set to see lasting memorials to those who went beyond the call of duty in World War One, with new roads throughout the city taking the names of the city's heroes. The initiative will see roads in the new Smithfield city centre business district named after the first four on the list. Then, over the next four years, as the city develops and grows,

everyone on the list will be given a street name memorial. The city council, working with The Sentinel and BBC Radio Stoke, has so far come up with a list of 31 World War One service personnel who were decorated for their bravery. Roads will be named in order of alphabetical priority, to ensure there is equality of recognition for all. The team are busy contacting the families right now to ensure they

are happy with the proposals and the first names will be announced as soon as permission has been given. Anyone who already has a street named after them will be filtered out before the final decisions are made on the new streets. Recipients of the Victoria Cross will each get a pavement plaque dedicated to their memory rather than a street name under a scheme

being administered by the Ministry of Defence. The city council and their media partners say there could be many more heroes out there who they don't as yet know about and they are appealing for people to get in touch if they have any information about a brave family member. If you have information, send the details through to communications@stoke.gov.uk

Call to recycle festive waste

CHRISTMAS is a time of conspicuous consumption – and there is always plenty of wrapping paper, uneaten food and other waste that ends up in the bin.

Residents can help the city council with the mammoth task of dealing with all that extra waste by making sure they use the right containers for different types of waste. The grey bin is for general waste so that means bagged animal or pet waste, bagged disposable nappies, cool ashes from fires, plastic food packaging including food waste, old style light bulbs (not energy efficient types) and shredded paper. The blue bin is for materials which can be recycled such as cardboard (including pizza boxes, cereal packets, corrugated cardboard), household cleaning bottles, yoghurt pots, meat trays, margarine and ice-cream tubs, glass bottles and jars, Tetra Paks, cans



and tins, empty aerosols, plastic milk bottles and soft drinks bottles. The green box is for newspapers, magazines, telephone directories and other paper. Residents who do not have a blue bin can use the green box for glass and plastic bottles, jars, tins and cardboard and the blue bag for newspapers, magazines and telephone directories. Please remember that residents can always take any excess waste to one of the city council's Household Waste and Recycling Centres at either Campbell Road, Stoke, or Federation Road, Burslem. See the city council website – stoke.gov.uk – for opening hours and the items that can be disposed of. Over the Christmas and New Year period some refuse collection rounds will be moved to different days – see the display panel below for full details of how these changes will affect you.



Getting into the Christmas spirit to remind residents to recycle their waste where possible are Refuse Collectors Steven Scott, left, and Ian McGuckien.

Technology turns waste into brand new products

ONCE recycling is collected from homes, the collection vehicle transports the materials to a specialist processing plant. Here they are sorted into categories, such as paper, plastics and metals, using a variety of technologies. The materials are then washed and treated, before being sold to manufacturers to make into new products again. So, for instance, plastic bottles can be recycled into a fleece jumper or even loft insulation. Problems can arise at the processing plant when items that are not suitable are included in the recycling. For example, food and garden waste cannot be placed in household

recycling bins, as it contaminates the other materials with dirt and grease, making them unsuitable to be turned into new products. Electrical appliances as well as textiles and hard metal and wooden items should be taken to a Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) for recycling as they can damage the processing plant's equipment. The most common item found in recycling bins is nappies – these are not recyclable and should be placed in the general waste bin instead. For more information on waste services, including where to find the nearest centre visit www.staffordshirewastepartnership.org

Waste & Recycling Collections

Christmas and New Year Collections



Normal Collection Day	Revised Collection Day
Monday 22 December	Saturday 20 December
Tuesday 23 December	Monday 22 December
Wednesday 24 December	Tuesday 23 December
Thursday 25 December	Wednesday 24 December
Friday 26 December	Saturday 27 December
Thursday 1 January	Saturday 3 January

Tree shredding service venues

WHEN the festive season is over residents can take their real Christmas trees to be shredded at various locations across the city.

- Friday 2 January:** Longton Park 9am-3pm, Burslem Park 9am-3pm.
- Monday 5 January:** Westport Lake 9am-11:30am, Tunstall Park 12:30pm-3pm.
- Tuesday 6 January:** Smithpool Park 9am-11:30am, Fenton Park 12:30pm-3pm.
- Wednesday 7 January:** Parkhall (golf course site) 9am-3pm.
- Thursday 8 January:** Hanford Park 9am-3pm.
- Friday 9 January:** Longton Park 9am-11:30am, Burslem Park 12:30pm-3pm.

Jobs created as work starts on three extra care villages

CONSTRUCTION of three extra care villages is now well underway with cranes on site and local jobs being created. Facilities in Abbey Hulton, Blurton and Chell will see 390 apartments built in the next 18 months.

The idea is to develop a community setting for people aged over 55 – each will include facilities such as hairdressers, treatment rooms, gyms, retail outlets and libraries.

Sapphire Extra Care are developing the villages after winning the contract from the city council.

The development is already bringing new jobs, contract opportunities and investment to the region with contractors Seddon and Eric Wright Construction using local companies and tradesmen as part of the three-site construction.

Richard Turpin, Director of Sapphire, said: "Our commitments are clear, we must maximise the local supply chain. Sapphire aims to ensure training and apprenticeship opportunities remain in Stoke-on-Trent and benefit the local communities in which we build."



Groundworks are underway on the new extra care village in Turnhurst Road, Chell.

Jobs and growth

Young carer is achiever at school and at home

MEGAN Craggs is into boy bands and spending time with her friends like most teenage girls. But there the similarity ends – because the 14-year-old Five Seconds of Summer fan from Fenton is a young carer who spends much of her time supporting her mum Michelle to look after her three brothers.

Korbyn, aged 12, Brodyn, who is ten, and seven-year-old Byron have all been diagnosed with either autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia or suffer anxiety so life in the Craggs household can be challenging.

"It can be difficult at times, they're quite a handful," said Megan, who has been helping to look after her brothers since she was about five. She occupies them with activities, helps tidy up and gives her brothers structure.

She said: "It can be hard because I can't have my friends round but I enjoy helping. I'm happy with life and don't think I'm missing out. I'm in top sets for everything at school and

passed my GCSE science two years early."

Her mum Michelle said: "She plays part of the parenting role and is my second pair of eyes and hands. Without her it would be chaos. I'm very proud of her. I couldn't ask for a better daughter."

Megan is registered as a young carer with the city council – one of 416 across the city supported by Young Carers Co-ordinator Karen Holdercroft.

She schedules twice-yearly meetings with Megan to check she is coping and her education, health and social needs are being met.

Karen said: "Megan's a real achiever. According to the 2011 census there are hundreds more young carers out there like her who aren't yet on the register so I want to find the hidden ones and make sure they're not vulnerable."

For more information about the support on offer, call 01782 235422 or email young.carers@stoke.gov.uk



A GREAT TEAM:
Megan Craggs and her mum Michelle.

Young people can get a wide variety of assistance and support from the city council's careers service. *Our City* spoke to one teenager who asked for help and is now taking his first steps in the world of work...

Vital help to get on career ladder

WHEN Aron Wallace left school with a clutch of exam certificates in his hand he really had no idea what he wanted to do next.

He embarked on a plastering course at Burslem College but soon discovered that it was not for him. With no firm career choice in mind, Aron, aged 18, of Evelyn Street, Fenton, spent the next couple of months applying for various jobs.

"I sent off lots of applications but never seemed to get very far," he said. "I was getting a bit frustrated by it all when someone suggested I should get in touch with the city council Careers Service."

"They were really helpful and after an initial interview I was put on the Career Service's 10-week GetSet programme funded by the European Social Fund to learn employability skills – things like how to work as part of a team, how to get on with new people and how to share ideas.

"I found that very useful and I

learned a lot. At the end of that course I was transferred to the council's Learn4Work Team who found me a placement at the Fenton Manor Sports Complex.

"After a few weeks the management there offered me a traineeship which runs until January next year, after which I'm hoping I'll be offered an apprenticeship."

Aron's job at Fenton Manor involves a mix of activities including setting up equipment for sports such as badminton and volleyball, cleaning duties and interacting with customers.

He said: "To be honest, when I was offered the placement I wasn't sure if it was going to be right for me. But now I really enjoy being here. I like the work, I like the people and I'm glad I was given this opportunity."

Fenton Manor Duty Manager Clare Dunn said Aron was doing well in his role. She added: "He's quickly become a valued member of the Fenton Manor team and is liked by all his colleagues."

The city council Careers Service – formerly Connexions –

Aron Wallace at Fenton Manor Sports Complex.

works with young people aged 11 to 19 years – or aged up to 25 years for people with a learning difficulty or disability.

The team can offer help and advice with career choice and planning, qualifications and how

to choose and apply for college and university courses, apprenticeships and training courses, job applications and CVs, work experience, skills for employment and preparing for job interviews.

For help, more information, to arrange an appointment or to speak to an adviser if you are below 20 years of age, phone 01782 237747, text 07879 115678, or email careers.advice@stoke.gov.uk

Couple look forward to first Christmas in their affordable £1 home

A great place to live



Chris Benn and Rebecca Dennis at home with their dog Teddy.

YOUNG couple Chris Benn and Rebecca Dennis are looking forward to Christmas in their new £1 home in Cobridge – a property they never could have afforded were it not for the city council's empty homes scheme.

They would have struggled as first time buyers to get on the housing ladder and jumped at the chance to buy their mid-terraced house in Century Street which came with a £30,000 renovation loan.

Rebecca, a 20-year-old photography student at Staffordshire University who plans to train as an art teacher, said: "I love it. It's exactly what we wanted. We've already knocked the fireplace out, decorated and carpeted. I've even got a walk-in wardrobe.

"We're only paying £290 a month on the loan. It's much cheaper than a mortgage. Life is perfect and our move has turned out much better than we imagined."

She and her fiancé Chris, who works on the production line at Bentley Motors in Crewe, are now saving for their wedding. Their family has already grown with the arrival of Teddy – a Pomeranian puppy.

Rebecca and Chris are among more than 30 people who have taken part in the pioneering scheme, funded by the city council and the Government's Clusters Of Empty Homes programme.

Thousands to converge on the city to take part in Corporate Games

UP to 5,000 amateur sportsmen and women are preparing to make Stoke-on-Trent their home for four days next summer as the city hosts the UK Corporate Games. Competitors from companies across the country will take part in a range of sports including hockey, cricket, netball and football.

Fenton Manor Sports Complex will host badminton, basketball and table tennis, Trentham Gardens will stage open water swimming, running and Dragon Boat

racing. Poker, karting and ten-pin bowling are also being staged in the city.

Taking place from June 25 to June 28 after a successful joint bid by the city council and Staffordshire County Council, other venues include the Staffordshire and Keele University sites.

Games Director Ben Sedgemore said: "From the first moment that we set foot in the area, our Venue Inspection Committee started to believe that it is the perfect destination for the UK Corporate Games in

2015. We have been fortunate enough to stage games all around the world in great cities like Moscow, Zagreb and Bilbao and right across the UK.

"But if you consider the massive indoor capacity at Fenton Manor and the beauty of Trentham Gardens in addition to the central location, we genuinely have confidence that this is a match for any destination."

Council Leader Councillor Mohammed Pervez said: "Stoke-on-Trent is a vibrant and rapidly regenerating city and thousands of

people from across the country will be staying, eating and drinking here – spending money and seeing for themselves what we have to offer for future visits.

"Stoke-on-Trent is the place to bring business and these Games will not only have an immediate positive economic impact on the city but also provide an ideal opportunity to showcase its many strengths to visitors and investors.

"This is exactly what a city undergoing renaissance should be doing."

Feedback on council for Fenton proposal

WIDE ranging consultation is underway on whether Fenton should have its own council after the people of two wards submitted a 1,500-signature petition.

All the options including town/parish council, neighbourhood management and community or area forums were set out in a public information booklet delivered to homes and businesses during October.

Also available as a download at stoke.gov.uk/fenton, the booklet contains a feedback form for residents of Fenton East as well

as Fenton West and Mount Pleasant to complete and send to Stoke-on-Trent City Council by December 19. Community feedback events are being staged in the area until December 18 with council officers on hand every Thursday from 10am to 3pm at Fenton Market to listen to opinions and answer questions.

The review sessions will be followed by further consultation until March next year to make sure all residents, businesses and interested parties have their say.

All feedback will then go before the council's Licensing and General Purposes Committee before going to full council.



Council Local Matters Co-ordinator Kevin Hawkins, left, talks with Fenton resident Sam Tunstall about the Fenton Community Governance proposals when they met up at the weekly market in the town.

Any governance changes as a result of the review will be introduced next summer.

The city council is committed to strengthening neighbourhoods and promoting active communities to take decisions and shape their area. This review will give people who live, work or

have a vested interest in Fenton the opportunity to have their say about how the town will be governed in the future.

It will assess whether or not to establish a town council as well as the possibility of introducing other community governance arrangements, for example a

community or area forum, as part of the Government's Localism Act.

Following the My City, My Say engagement events the city council will be rolling out three pilots to look at how the community can influence services to meet local need.



Council Local Matters Officer Charlotte Eccles, right, was on hand at Fenton Market to seek opinions from Fenton residents Graham and Linda Burton about the Governance proposals for the town.



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FORTHCOMING PUBLIC MEETINGS AT THE CIVIC CENTRE, STOKE:

The next Cabinet meetings between the 24 November 2014 and 30 January 2015 are as follows: 27 November and 18 December 2014 and 22 January 2015.

The next full City Council meetings during this period will be on 4 December 2014 and 29 January 2015 at 5.30pm.

For more information on your Councillors go to stoke.gov.uk/councillors
Councillors can also be contacted through the Councillor and Civic Support Team who can take messages and forward them on. They can be contacted on (01782) 231922 or 231924.



Peter, aged 84, stays in Shape(s)

PETER Mountain joined Shapes Health and Leisure Club at the age of 59 – and he is still pumping iron in its state-of-the-art fitness suites a quarter of a century later!

The 84-year-old has put his body through its paces three times a week at the council-run facility within Fenton Manor Sports Complex ever since he enrolled as a member in 1989 to shed some weight.

Peter still has the fitness assessment which was carried out on him at the gym when he joined, showing that he needed to lose some of his 17 stone 5lbs weight.

“I joined Shapes because I wanted to regain the energy that I used to have,” he said. “I soon got my weight down to the target of 14 stones and it has remained thereabouts since. The gym has always been very well equipped and the staff are wonderful. I also enjoy the camaraderie which exists among the members.”

Peter, of Newcastle, a retired marketing research company owner, is an inspiration to other users of the club’s equipment, pool and Health Spa.

He begins his three-hour sessions at 8am with a programme of personalised fitness exercises that he never varies including cycling, lifting 55 kilo weights, working on the treadmill and toning up on the rowing machine.



Healthy lives

He then moves to the Health Spa where he visits the sauna, steam room and spa pool, interspersed with five cold plunges.

“I don’t feel anything like 84 and I always feel fantastic after visiting Shapes,” he said.

“My motto is – you only have one body, make sure you look after it. My exercise regime is all about being

consistent – people need to do what’s right for them and then maintain their programme.”

Memberships at Shapes Health and Leisure Club are priced at £30 per month, and include unlimited, anytime use of the gyms, pools, spa, over 60 exercise, spinning and aquarobics classes each week, free parking and free racquet

sports with other members at Fenton Manor Sports Complex.

When joining Shapes, members can enjoy their first month free and pay no initial or joining fees.

For further details, pop along to see a member of the team, call 01782 233444 or visit stoke.gov.uk/shapes.



Peter Mountain exercising at Shapes Health and Leisure Club. Inset left, Peter jumps in the cold plunge pool which is part of his regular exercise programme.

Four quality venues offer wide range of fitness activities

SHAPES Health and Leisure Club is among a range of council-run health and leisure facilities in Stoke-on-Trent:

The Wallace Sport and Education Centre in Abbey Hulton has been at the heart of the community since opening in 2004, and attracts guests from across the city to its range of facilities. The fitness suite provides a range of cardio-vascular machines, weight machines and free weights while fitness classes led by qualified and friendly instructors include spinning, 50+ Zumba and Yoga.

Memberships at the Wallace Centre are priced at £19.50 per month. Contact the



centre on **01782 233555** or visit stoke.gov.uk/wallace.

Dimensions Leisure Centre’s health and fitness club in Burslem offers a wide range of modern cardiovascular and resistance equipment in an air-conditioned gym from as little as £22 a month.

Members receive an individual fitness assessment to help identify and agree goals, followed by a gym instruction

session and ongoing support. Packages include unlimited use of the gym and a growing programme of exercise and spinning classes, and free parking.

As an added bonus, members can bring a child along to any open swim session free of charge (children under eight years old require adult supervision in the pool).

Contact the centre on **01782 233500** or visit stoke.gov.uk/dimensions.

Northwood Stadium gives members the chance to work out whilst overlooking the city’s only 400m athletics track.

They can also enjoy anytime use of the track, weights area and range of indoor and outdoor exercise classes for just £12.50 per month. Packages also include free parking. Contact the centre on **01782 234400** or visit stoke.gov.uk/northwoodstadium

For up-to-date details on city council opening times over the Christmas period visit stoke.gov.uk/christmas

Our City is published by a partnership of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service



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