

The Right Honourable Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON  
SW1P 4DF

My Ref: PA / TK 140

Your Ref:

Date: 4 May 2020

Dear Robert

## **COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY**

I am writing to you to express my thanks for the support that you and MHCLG have given to Staffordshire in the weeks since the outbreak of Covid-19, to tell you what we have been doing for our residents in support of the Government's strategy, and what plans we have for the recovery of the county's economy and society in the months ahead.

Viewed from Staffordshire, the Government's strategy for dealing with the Covid-19 has been excellent, particularly the shielding operation, which makes the most of the "National" in the NHS. I do not know of another country which has tried this, but then no other country probably has the level of individual health data at a national level to attempt it. If it works, and I believe that it will, it will save many thousands of lives. There will undoubtedly be commentators who will, with perfect hindsight and no responsibility to deliver, criticise the response, but from a local authority viewpoint which is accountable and responsible for delivery, we are in complete support. My only critical observation is that there has been an understandable tendency to over-centralise the response from London, which has had mixed results in certain areas. I would encourage you to give us the authority to lead on the operationalisation and tactics at a local level, to enable you and us to focus on the complex task of lifting the lockdown arrangements safely and getting the country back to work.

We are very grateful for the rapid and decisive intervention that you have undertaken in the two tranches of funding in the past month. Staffordshire County Council (SCC) has received £37.7M to support our efforts, and we are perhaps unusual as a strategic council in celebrating the £9.1M which you have allocated to Staffordshire's eight districts and boroughs. We have always worked with our districts and boroughs to make 2-tier arrangements serve our residents effectively, balancing between those services and activities that work best at a large population level of close to a million, and those which benefit from a local finger-tip feel with populations of around 100,000, right down to our many Town and Parish Councils. I can state without fear of contradiction that I have never seen our councils across Staffordshire and with Stoke working more effectively together, supporting our volunteers and communities, and for that reason alone, I am

delighted that you have made a larger allocation to lower-tier councils in your second tranche of funding. Of course, there are difficult days ahead for us all, both financially, with extra demand, lost income and savings missed, and more widely as we lead the recovery from this emergency, but we do so in a better place with the strong relationships that we already enjoy in Staffordshire and because of your funding decisions to allocate almost £64M across Staffordshire and Stoke.

Staffordshire County Council mobilised early to lead the response to Covid-19. Our Incident Management Team had only just stood down after responding to the floods when we stood them up again for this emergency. Recognising that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) would be a key factor in maintaining and bolstering the care workforce's morale and effectiveness, we made our first order for PPE on 10 March; we have now spent close to £1.5M on masks, aprons, gloves etc. The central drops to the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) constitute only about 4% of our requirements, and it is notable that, having established a stable and resilient supply chain from the start, no Staffordshire care home has gone without PPE, and our care workforce remains motivated and committed as a result. This is despite our having the tragic distinction of Bradwell Hall Nursing Home located in our county, a large end-of-life specialist provider, where over 30 residents have died of Covid-19. With our support with PPE, staffing, infection control and financial sustainability, the home has managed to remain functioning, along with the other 242 care and nursing homes and 355 home care providers across the county.

I am very pleased to inform you that we also took an early lead in getting additional personnel into the care workforce, with 750 volunteers for our I Count campaign for internal SCC officers, and 450 for the I Care campaign, aimed at workers who are furloughed or have lost their jobs. As well as shifting roles to delivering food or working in call centres, over 200 have been trained in personal care for work in our care and nursing homes and in home care. Now that there is a national scheme seeking to attract people into the care workforce, we are making the links to encourage the I Care volunteers to make a permanent career change.

I would also highlight the support to the shielded cohort in Staffordshire. As well as the central scheme, we have spent over £1M on supporting the wider vulnerable cohort, forming a central distribution hub at the County Showground, with the majority of deliveries being undertaken by our districts and boroughs through their excellent contacts with the voluntary sector. They must be applauded for their rapid response in providing accommodation for the homeless and rough sleepers ensuring they were safe and indoors.

I would like to make two observations from this experience. Firstly, the sharing of data from central to local government, although not without its problems, sets a precedent that I hope will remain after the emergency; it is clearly working for our vulnerable residents, allowing us to target resources more effectively. Secondly, it is noticeable that the vast majority of the work in the voluntary sector is being taken on by local community and voluntary groups; the national charities are, with the exception of the British Red Cross, notable by their absence. As we plan for the recovery and renewal phase, both are aspects that we will seek to retain and develop.

The Government's arrangements for supporting businesses and workers have been exemplary, and our districts and boroughs have got the funding out as quickly as possible. Staffordshire is a county with over 30,000 micro-businesses, many of which do not qualify for any support. As a result, we have instituted a grant scheme for up to £1,000 for those businesses with less than nine employees needing a small injection of

cash to get them through. We have had over 1,600 applicants in just five days and had to pause the scheme so we can deal with the applications.

Our planning focus with regard to the response phase is now on getting the testing strategy right in Staffordshire. Pulling together the efforts of the NHS, the armed forces and local government will ensure that the testing and contact tracing is joined-up and effective, now that the daily testing total of 100,000 has been reached. Clearly, this part of the response will run in parallel with the recovery phase, which we have already launched. As we plan to re-open our Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs), the practicalities of re-opening schools, businesses and public transport will dominate our thinking. Although it is probably being over-used at the moment, there is no doubt that we are entering a "New Normal".

Our embarkation on the recovery phase coincides with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day. You may be interested to know that we are taking a slightly different focus on the celebrations in Staffordshire, not only commemorating the end of the Second World War, but also taking lessons from post-war reconstruction both in the UK and Germany, where an almost forgotten cohort of British politicians, civil servants and service personnel such as Major Ivan Hirst made a significant contribution to the German Wirtschaftswunder, including the establishment from the ruins of German industry of such household names as Volkswagen. Our modern equivalent might well be the 5G and fibre broadband bid that you may remember we submitted just before the onset of the Covid-19 outbreak, in anticipation of the new digital future. We will certainly need some inspired thinking and leadership if we are to bounce back as we would wish, and Staffordshire has a great industrial history of providing that initiative.

I hope that you will agree that we are in support of the Government's strategy and are focussed on what matters to Staffordshire residents and businesses.

In closing, I would encourage you to support us in this endeavour, and to give us the authority and permissions that we require for success. Our residents expect us to meet their needs quickly and will not forgive us if we waste time in circular organisational form conversations about local government structures, which interest only a very few, and for which I detect no appetite in Staffordshire.

Thank you again for your support.

Yours sincerely



**Philip Atkins, OBE**  
**Leader of the Council**

The Right Honourable Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer  
The Right Honourable Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Staffordshire Members of Parliament  
Councillor James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association  
Councillor Izzi Seccombe OBE, Leader of the LGA Conservative Group  
Leaders and Chief Executives of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Councils  
Councillor David Williams, Chairman of the County Councils Network

Alun Rogers, Chair of Staffordshire and Stoke Local Enterprise Partnership  
Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Local Government Association  
Simon Edwards, Director of the County Councils Network