STAFFORD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

LOCAL AREA ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES OF THE 35TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT STAFFORD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE – SHIRE HALL BUSINESS CENTRE, STAFFORD.

Monday 3rd November 2025

Local Area Advisory Board members present

Geoff Barton	GB	Canalside Farm and **President of Stafford Chamber**
Nigel Ryan	NR	EVC Solutions and **Deputy President of Stafford Chamber**
Adam Bullock	AB	Topcashback
Lorraine Conkey	LC	LR Partnership Events
Dan Ellis	DE	EPX Ltd
Simon Jobson	SJ	Jobson's Solicitors
Chris Lewis	CL	The Lewis Partnership
Sheryl Moore	SM	Converge
Judith Smith	JS	Sustainabilitysmith Ltd
Michelle Smith	MS	Stafford Borough Council

Chamber members in attendance

Ange Arnold	AA	Stone Mortgages
Alison Gallagher-Hughes	AG	Tillymint Communications
Andy Plumley	AP	Panda Press
Dan West	DW	Fiveways Insurance

Chambers' staff in attendance

Chris Plant	CP
Declan Riddell	DR

Apologies: Not applicable.

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1. **WELCOME**

GB welcomed all to the 35th Stafford Chamber Annual General Meeting (AGM). The AGM Notice, Annual Review and Minutes of the last meeting were sent out by e-mail and have been available on the website since Friday 10th October 2025.

2. **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE 34th AGM ON MONDAY 4th NOVEMBER 2024**

The minutes of the 34th Annual General Meeting had been circulated by email ahead of the meeting and have been available on the website since Friday 10th October 2025.

The acceptance of the minutes as a true record was proposed by Simon Jobson and seconded by Adam Bullock. The minutes were approved.

3. **THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT – READ OUT BY PRESIDENT OF STAFFORD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, GEOFF BARTON.**

'2025 has been another challenging year for the business community but Stafford Chamber of Commerce continues to do an excellent job in providing support and helping to encourage collaboration across local businesses. I would like to express my thanks to all.

Stafford Chamber membership currently stands at 288, slightly up on the equivalent 2024 figure of 287. Membership retention continues to be a challenge, as businesses struggle to cope with pressures such as the actual rising cost of doing business. Despite the turbulent trading conditions, the Chamber continues to be the "go to place" for business advice and support.

The Chamber has continued to offer expert business start-up advice to budding entrepreneurs across the Borough, who have benefited from the tailored intensive business start-up support provided through the Business Start-up Programme.

The Chamber has continued to deliver support for the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub, including business support events held across the County. Many public sector funding streams such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) are due to come to an end in March 2026 and the Chamber continues to actively lobby for clarity around the future of business support beyond this date.

Stafford Chamber of Commerce.

Our Chamber Export documentation team continues to process import & export customs declarations. The team is processing more declarations than other Chambers across the West Midlands and ranks as the second highest performing desk in the country. Not bad for a county which doesn't have an airport or seaport!

Back in 2022, Staffordshire Chambers' of Commerce was appointed as the designated employer representative body for the Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). During the last three years, the LSIP has played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between the training demanded by employers and the training delivered through local training providers.

We continue to work with Staffordshire Police in delivering the Business Crime Helpline and have extended our contract to deliver Domestic Abuse Workplace Champions training across Staffordshire.

The Chamber events team has continued to deliver a rich and diverse mix of events throughout 2025. In the past year, the Chamber has successfully hosted a total of 320 events, attracting an impressive 7,198 delegates, including Speed Networking, Netwalking at Victoria Park and the ever-popular Stafford Business Together social evenings, on the last Thursday of the month. This event has moved around the Stafford Borough area.

Staffordshire Chambers' of Commerce Business Awards was another resounding success, with the event moving to Uttoxeter Racecourse and on a balmy summer evening, Stafford businesses once again took their fair share of places on the winners' podium.

We continue to serve as the voice of our members through our lobbying and representation role and the Stafford Local Area Advisory Board will develop a number of key business priorities which will be reviewed in the coming months.

During the year, we have met with the local MP for Stafford, Leigh Ingham, connecting our members with elected politicians. In February 2026, we're planning to meet with Stafford Borough Council's Cabinet.

The past year has seen Stafford Chamber continue to amplify the voice of local businesses, shaping debate, representing members and influencing decision-makers across the county and beyond.

Stafford Chamber of Commerce.

A major topic has been the debate around the future structure of local government in Staffordshire. The Labour government has asked councils to develop proposals for new unitary authorities, replacing the existing two-tier system.

Up to now, there have been several proposed solutions, including a north/south, east/west and three way split. Local government reorganisation presents both challenges and opportunities but we call on all parties to press ahead and find common ground on moving forward. We can't afford to wait, as this could lead to Staffordshire falling behind other areas who have secured an agreement.

Our Policy Adviser (Declan), has been in the spotlight through a series of Chamber campaigns, including the issue of late payments. The campaign has encouraged small businesses to share their experiences as the Government consults on new legislative measures to tackle the problem, one which, according to the Department for Business & Trade, costs the UK economy almost £11 billion a year.

On the marketing front, our communications reach continues to expand across Staffordshire Moorlands, Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent. Daily Focus, Staffordshire's biggest business news publication, reaches 15,000 inboxes every day, and features business stories from across the Moorlands. It provides a vital platform for Stafford businesses to share their successes, champion innovation and inspire others. As a unified Chamber voice, we continue to connect and represent our business community through compelling storytelling and proactive engagement.

We look forward to growth and prosperity across the Borough, in the coming years. We welcome improvements to Stafford Town Centre, supported by the Future High Streets Fund and hope that these changes will encourage more businesses to settle in the town, as well as boosting town centre footfall. 2025 saw the opening of Newcastle & Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG) Institute of Technology (IoT) and this is a great asset for the town, offering cutting edge training and skills for a new generation of learners. Our next LAAB meeting will take place at the new IoT and we'll look forward to getting a guided tour of the facilities.

During the course of this year, we have taken our LAAB meetings 'on the road' and a big thanks to those members who have hosted, including Converge and Yarnfield Park Conference Centre.

I think it has helped to showcase some of the amazing business success stories from across the Borough and I look forward to visiting more businesses in 2026 starting with that visit to the IoT on Monday 12th January.

I would like to express my gratitude to our Stafford Chamber Local Area Advisory Board members for their support and time during the last twelve months, with particular appreciation to Judith Smith of Sustainabilitysmith Ltd, who is stepping down from her role as a LAAB member, after four years of service. I would also like to offer my thanks to Lisa Clemson, India Hanspal and John Bill who have all resigned from the LAAB during the year.

The Stafford Local Area Advisory Board has a diverse mix of skills and sector backgrounds and I feel this puts us in a very strong position as we head into 2026.'

4. **TO INFORM THE APPOINTMENT OF NEW PRESIDENT AND DEPUTY PRESIDENT**

   The appointment of Nigel Ryan of EVC Solutions, as President of Stafford Chamber and Geoff Barton to step down as President and become Deputy President. Proposed by Judith Smith and seconded by Lorraine Conkey.

5. **TO CONFIRM THE ELECTION OF CHAMBER LOCAL AREA ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS**

In accordance with the Articles of Association, one third of the elected Local Area Advisory Board members must retire each year.

John Bill, Lisa Clemson and India Hanspal have resigned during the course of this year.

Judith Smith has announced that she will resign as a member of Local Area Advisory Board, with immediate effect.

Lorraine Conkey of LR Partnerships has confirmed an intention to stand for re-election, to serve a further three year term.

Ange Arnold of Topcashback, Alison Gallagher-Hughes of Tillymint, Andy Plumley of Panda Press, Dan West of Fiveways Insurance, Lisa Perry and Lesley Taylor of Addmaster have all announced intention to stand for election to join the Stafford Chamber Local Area Advisory Board.

Nominations for five vacancies including those standing for re-election on the Stafford Chamber Local Area Advisory Board have been sought from the membership and six members nominated themselves to join the Stafford Chamber Local Area Advisory Board.

This necessitated an election by the membership which was held from Thursday 25th September to Thursday 2nd October 2025 and the following members received the most votes:

- Ange Arnold of Topcashback
- Alison Gallagher Hughes of Tillymint
- Andy Plumley of Panda Press
- Dan West of Fiveways Insurance

The above appointments were proposed by Simon Jobson and seconded by Dan Ellis.

The President confirmed that the formal business for the Stafford Chamber Local Area Board 35th Annual General Meeting was complete and thanked members for their attendance.