

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

MONDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2020

PRESENT: Councillor D Shaw (Chair)

Councillors J Aberley, G Bentley, G Heath, I Herdman, K Hoptroff, B A Hughes, J T Jones, K Martin, T Riley, P Roberts, L Swindlehurst, P Taylor, R Ward, P Wood and N Yates.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor C J S Atkins, M Bowen, S Coleman, M A Deaville, E Fallows, M Gledhill, T Holmes, K J Jackson, L A Malyon, J Porter, D Price, S E Ralphs MBE, P Routledge, J Salt and S Scalise.

APOLOGIES: Councillor T McNicol.

8 **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS, IF ANY.**

There were none.

9 **TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.**

DECIDED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Panel held on the 27th July 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10 **TO NOTE THE MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING OF THE POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME PANEL.**

DECIDED: That the minutes from the last meeting of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel be **NOTED**.

11 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:**

No declarations of interests were made.

12 **QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, IF ANY.**

1. Questions received from Councillor Salt:

“Between instigating the climate emergency and today – please inform the council by how much SMDC’s actions have reduced carbon emissions? When presenting the data, could you explicitly demonstrate what has been Covid’s impact and what has been down to our own efforts?”

Response:

The stated intention of the Council is to produce a comprehensive climate change plan effective from the year 2021/22. This year the Council set out key enabling actions which taken together with the work of the Climate Change Subgroup will

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 October 2020

inform that Climate Change Plan. This year's activity was set out in the form of an information digest. Data collection and analysis is one of this year's key activities. This activity is ongoing with the aim of ensuring data used to underpin the Council's targets is as comprehensive as possible and consistent to ensure we can compare like with like. The Council has engaged the Energy Saving Trust to assist with data analysis and options for consideration. Some key illustrative data is below:

2019 Data: Indication of CO2 emissions for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council - CO2 emissions from fleet vehicles (Waste, Street Scene, Parks), staff business mileage.

- Fleet: 636 metric tonnes of CO2
- Business Travel: 63.75 metric tonnes (shared with HPBC) = 31.875 metric tonnes for SMDC
- Property: Gas and electricity (Leisure Centres not included and Moorlands House not apportioned to using organisations) = 421 metric tonnes
- **Total 1,089 metric tonnes of CO2**

Note:

- Alliance CO2 from business travel has been reducing year on year - from 110.34 metric tonnes in 2013 to 63.75 metric tonnes in 2019. Mileage has reduced in that period from 459,407 miles in 2013 to 284,985 miles in 2019.
- **Covid-19** Comparing Alliance business miles/CO2 for the 5 month period April to August 2020 with the same period in 2019 – 27 metric tonnes of CO2 (2019), 9.1 metric tonnes CO2 (2020).
- Further work is required on the data (to check data is fully inclusive, takes account of recording systems which have changed over time to make sure year on year comparisons are robust and to provide a detailed breakdown by area of operation). The data for the Council's CO2 emissions will be ready in December 2020 in time to inform targets for the 2021/22 plan.

By way of supplementary questions, Cllr Salt asked if the Council would be carbon neutral by 2030. The Portfolio Holder believed this would be the case, albeit an ambitious target for the whole of the District. Councillor Porter was also asked to explain how the £10k grant would encourage carbon neutrality. The Climate Change Community Fund had been delayed due to Covid-19 and examples of the type of projects that schools could use the money for included; eco clubs, recycling, tree planting and nature based projects. It was hoped that the scheme could commence in Spring/Summer 2021.

2. *"When will Biddulph TC receive its funding for the Covid grant application that it made months ago?"*

Response:

Councillor Ralphs confirmed that the application for funding had been approved and assured Councillor Salt that the payment was being processed.

3. *"When will SMDC complete its tree planting strategy so that Town and Parish councils can get on with the task of planting trees in their areas on SMDC owned land (where appropriate)?"*

Response:

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 October 2020

SMDC formally adopted its Tree Strategy in 2016. The main document notes the context of the Council's tree-related policies and objectives, with links to the corporate plan aims, and sets out our policies in areas such as tree protection, tree management and planting. This is supported by appendices comprising a set of more technical Good Practice Guides covering:

1. Tree Work
2. Tree Management
3. Trees and Development
4. Tree Risk Management

Several factors now suggest a review/update of the Tree Strategy would be appropriate - it's coming up to 5 years since the Tree Strategy was first adopted, a climate emergency has been declared by the Council, there is a new Corporate Plan and the Local Plan has been adopted.

A key strategy to consider in the context of the question is the Green Infrastructure Strategy which is part of the Local Plan. To ensure the delivery of that strategy the Council has commissioned Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to work with us to develop the delivery plan (the Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan). Development this year has involved comprehensive mapping and assessment of current habitats and species and opportunities to join up and extend otherwise isolated pockets. Development has reached the stage of identifying projects (in 3 categories) – large scale strategic projects, bringing forward development sites, and community projects.

The Delivery Plan provides detailed mapping and an evidence base which supports the development of nature recovery networks and corridors and in turn can inform decision making about what species of plants and what kinds of habitats it would be best to create, enhance or safeguard in particular locations. With this in mind and under the heading of community projects, the expectation is that over the next two months the team leading the Delivery Plan development will start to engage with Parish and Town Councils and Community Groups in relation to specific sites and local opportunities that they identify.

In parallel with the work to develop the Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan Staffordshire wildlife Trust have agreed to assist the Council's team responsible for parks and open spaces to develop Council policy with regard to the maintenance of council land so as to increase opportunities for wildlife. This will form a revised Parks Management Strategy and be linked to the revision of the Tree Planting Strategy.

The Green Infrastructure delivery plan provides an evidence-based context within which we can make a site specific decision about what should be planted - it will not necessarily be trees. We will want to plant as many trees as possible on our land where that is the rights thing to do – the 'right thing' in terms of enhancing wildlife (informed by the plan), balanced with the needs of the particular amenity we are planting on, impact on neighbours, community safety considerations and cost of maintenance etc.

Councillor Salt was pleased with the comprehensive response to her question and gave her thanks to officers. She asked if a time frame for the completion of the Tree Planting Strategy could be provided. Councillor Porter agreed this was extremely important to address and advised that the strategy would be updated and reviewed next year. In the meantime, councillors could contact Steve Massey - Arboricultural Officer or Mark Forrester – Head of Democratic and Community Services, with details of areas of land which had been identified for planting.

4. Received from Councillor Swindlehurst:

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 October 2020

“What is the present role of community and voluntary groups in maintaining public assets such as benches, planted areas and bus shelters?”

Response:

Councillor Ralphs explained that there were a number of volunteers and voluntary groups which carried out excellent work in the area, particularly at the countryside sites. Examples of such work included; maintenance of benches, steps, stiles, pathway clearance, hedge laying and litter picking. Recently, some benches had been installed by the West End Leek voluntary group.

By way of supplementary questions, Councillor Swindlehurst wished to know if the recent work carried out by volunteers to the bus shelter on Stockwell Street, Leek had been risk assessed and was in-line with the Health and Safety at Work Act. She also asked what the implications were for regeneration and recovery in the current pandemic climate, if the commitment to the maintenance of the street scene was not fulfilled. The Leader confirmed that work to the bus shelter had been carried out at her request and authority for the aspects mentioned had been granted by the Council. The project had been monitored and supervised as it was in the vicinity of Moorlands House. In relation to the second supplementary question, Cllr Ralphs agreed that first impressions and appearance of the towns mattered to both visitors and residents. On a weekly basis, the Leader liaised with the Mayor of each town to identify work that needed to be carried out. This information was then passed on to the relevant officers at the Council. The way in which the Council's assets were managed was being reviewed and options were being explored which included the contract being managed in-house, as it was important to have a maintenance programme under the Council's control.

5. Received from Councillor Hoptroff:

“What progress has the Leader made in her bid to improve rural bus services as she promised to full council on the 19th October 2019?”

Response:

The Leader explained that the rural bus project commenced in November 2019, and by the end of February 2020, she had identified a bus company prepared to provide a rural service for a period of 12 months. A route to cover outlying villages and allow 2 hours shopping in the towns had been agreed. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic the pilot scheme had been put on hold and would hopefully re-commence in May 2021. Parish Councils had been made aware of the current situation.

Councillor Hoptroff requested clarification around the funding for this project and thought that the Council should put more pressure on bus companies to provide additional services at this time. Councillor Ralphs confirmed that the Council had funding for pilot projects such as this, and thought it was unfair to expect bus companies to provide additional services, as the current priority was to keep existing routes running and passenger safety. Councillor Bowen contributed to the response and advised that he had been in touch with bus companies and

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 October 2020

established that current bus routes were at capacity, unless extra vehicles were purchased.

Councillor Bentley suggested that the buses which transported staff to Alton Towers could potentially also carry members of the public.

13 YOUR HOUSING GROUP UPDATE.

Members considered a briefing paper introduced by Sharon Wheeler – Regional Housing Manager South, which provided a performance and development update on YHG business areas identified in the legacy agreement and related to business activity between January 2020 and June 2020. Aaron Hamersley – Head of Housing Management, was also present at the meeting, along with two customer representatives; Cheryl Ballan and George Wallace.

Topics covered within the report included:

- Your Housing Group Response to Covid-19
- Housing Management
- Neighbourhood Inspections
- “Out and About” Customer Engagement Events
- Agile Working
- Neighbourhood Information
- Compliance
- Development
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Improvement to Assets
- Digital Engagement
- Community Regeneration
- Regeneration
- Revolution Launderette Unit, Mill Street Leek
- Swallow Walk, Biddulph

The Panel thanked the Officers and Team for the report which contained positive information. Members commented and asked questions around the following subject areas:-

Regular surgeries in the 3 main towns – Sharon Wheeler advised that the organisation felt it was more effective to hold ‘out and about’ events rather than customers being asked to attend fixed surgeries. Statistics confirmed that the surgery at Leek was not well attended. It was generally accepted that the mobile office was a good way for people to make contact with YHG but it was important for this to be promoted.

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 October 2020

Contact by telephone – An example of poor attitude and customer service provided over the telephone was discussed and it was agreed this would be investigated after the meeting. Other members gave accounts of good customer service. However, matters took a long time to resolve and there was an overall level of concern and frustration in relation to the telephone service received by customers. Sharon Wheeler was sorry to hear about these problems and gave assurance that the Moorlands had an active Housing Team. Members could contact her at any time and she would ensure that they were responded to. Cheryl Ballan advised that she would raise these concerns at the next YHG Scrutiny Meeting.

Contact list – A YHG contact list would be beneficial for members. This would be circulated to the Panel.

6 Month extension of evictions – Your Housing Group would follow the latest government guidance for evictions.

Re-instatement of CCTV cameras at Kingsfield Avenue, Biddulph due to anti-social behaviour – Officers agreed this would be looked into after the meeting.

List of YHG assets/ownership – It was agreed that YHG would provide ownership information on a case by case basis and also provide a list of the specific areas where the organisation had responsibility for grounds maintenance.

Climate change mitigation – Councillor Yates inquired if YHG had identified areas of land that would be suitable for planting schemes. Some landscaping had recently been carried out in the area and the YHG Regeneration Manager would contact the councillor in relation to this query.

Fix 360 – The Portfolio Holder for Communities highlighted communication issues with the Fix 360 Repairs Team and the length of time taken by this Team to respond to complaints. He requested that all members made him aware of any particular problems they had encountered with the Repairs Team. The Officers understood the issues around repairs and would look into this further.

YHG was praised for its work at Bellevue Flats and Mill Street Laundrette in Leek and it was commented how positively the organisation responded to cases raised by members.

Discussion also took place in relation to communication with residents and incidents of anti-social behaviour, level of housing stock and the criteria for the letting of bungalows. In response to additional information on Work Clubs, the relevant Officer at YHG would be contacted and asked to provide an overview for members.

DECIDED: That the update be received and comments noted.

14 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE REPORT.

Councillor Porter – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity, introduced the Climate Change Update report and a more recent briefing paper on the Climate Change Working Group which set out the work carried out by the Council to date.

Discussion took place around the 10 year fleet replacement programme, possible investment in hydrogen fleet, photovoltaics combined with battery storage packs, LED lighting and heat pumps. Councillor Yates also highlighted his concerns in

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 October 2020

relation to smaller business potentially being discouraged by the ISO 14001 criteria within the Council's Procurement Strategy.

Councillor Porter agreed that the fleet replacement programme was a priority to ensure emissions were reduced and the vehicles made as efficient as possible. The Energy Saving Trust was working with the Council and provided advice on vehicles powered by hydrogen. He welcomed suggestions from members to reduce carbon emissions. Councillor Yates offered to send an email containing his ideas and suggestions to the Portfolio Holder. In regard to the Procurement Strategy, Councillor Porter was determined for this to be science led and for products and services to be purchased with the lowest greenhouse gas impact.

Councillor Yates advised the Panel, that the Natural Environment Working Group had made a recommendation to empower Town and Parish Councils to take an active role in green spaces. In response, Councillor Porter agreed that the Parish and Town councillors had the local knowledge and it was important for them to be involved. He had visited some Parish Councils, was in discussion with the Chairman of the Parish Assembly and hoped to contact as many Town and Parish Councils as possible.

The Panel debated the delay of the transfer of Wetley Moor and the management of all of the country parks by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT). Councillor Yates requested for SWT to be invited to a future meeting of the Climate Change Working Group.

Finally, the Panel discussed the energy consumption of the Council, increased renewable energy and the importance of actions, outcomes and impact, in relation to the Council's carbon footprint being reduced.

DECIDED:

- 1) The actions taken to date be noted.
- 2) The proposed actions for 2020/21 set out in 7.7.1 – 7.7.8 of the report be noted;
- 3) For the figures on the number of leased and purchased Council vehicles be circulated to members;
- 4) For a written response in relation to the Council Procurement Strategy and ISO 14001 be provided by the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity.
- 5) For the costs and savings associated with the transfer of the Country Parks to SWT be circulated to members of the Panel.

15 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel considered its Work Programme and agreed the items listed.

DECIDED: That the Work Programme for 2020-21 be agreed.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 October 2020

_____Chairman _____Date