

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

MONDAY, 17 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: Councillor D Shaw (Chair)

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

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors C J S Atkins, M Bowen, B Cawley, M Deaville, E Fallows, K Flunder, M Gledhill, A Hart, I Plant, J Porter, P Wood and S Coleman

APOLOGIES: Councillor T McNicol.

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

There were none.

78 **URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS, IF ANY (24 HOURS NOTICE TO BE PROVIDED TO THE CHAIRMAN)**

No urgent items of business were raised.

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

DECIDED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 15 November 2021 be **APPROVED** as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

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

81 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:**

Agenda No.	Member Declaring Interest	Nature of Interest
Agenda Item 9 – Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Annual Update	Cllrs Atkins, Hoptroff and Swindlehurst	Other – All trustees of the Leek CAB.

82 **WORK PROGRAMME**

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Members discussed the importance of the Climate Change Action Plan and the possibility of it being included as a standing item for each meeting of the Panel. Regular updates on the Council's website which demonstrated to the public the actions that had been taken were requested. David Smith – Head of Communities and Climate Change, advised that improvements to the website were planned following an upgrade to the system. The Portfolio Holder also gave examples of recent campaigns which had been displayed on the website and agreed that more work could be done with a view to incorporate more interactive content on the website.

Councillor Roberts suggested the Fire and Rescue Service could be invited to attend the meeting of the Panel scheduled for March 2022.

DECIDED: That the Panel's Work Programme be agreed, subject to, the inclusion of a standing item on Climate Change for each meeting and the Fire and Rescue Service being invited to the meeting on 7 March 2022.

83

QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, IF ANY.

Questions received from Councillor Yates:

1. A resident has informed me that Support Staffordshire are sending out invitations to public workshops on behalf of SMDC on Part 2 of the Climate Change Action Plan, is this correct, if so what is their remit in terms of: who is invited; what is the timetable; are Anthesis involved; what is the precise purpose/aim?

Response from Councillor Porter – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change & Biodiversity:

The Council has commissioned Anthesis to carry out a series of workshops for the Council as was set out in the report that was considered by this Panel on the 15th November 2021. An update on the workshops will be provided as part of the climate change verbal update this evening.

2. Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency measures are an important part of Part 2 of the Climate Change Action Plan; does SMDC have any plans to reinforce their intended actions in light of the current Energy Crisis?

Response from Councillor Porter – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change & Biodiversity:

The Chief Executive has called a meeting of relevant Heads of Service next week to discuss the issue. We have identified fuel poverty and energy efficiency as priorities and we will look to see what we can do at a district level to respond appropriately to this national problem.

By way of supplementary questions, Councillor Yates requested a commitment to communicate with members when the Council was planning any future workshops etc. and for review of local authority housing allowance rates. In response, he was asked to write to Councillor Ralphs – The Leader, for the matter of the review to be considered.

He also mentioned the financial stress felt by residents due to increased energy prices, and made a suggestion for an advice help sheet to be included with the Council Tax bills. In addition to this, Councillor Porter explained, the Revenues Team

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had supported low income families and would continue to do so. The Panel would be updated on the outcome of the meeting called by the CEO.

84 **CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU - ANNUAL UPDATE (LEEK, CHEADLE & STAFFORDSHIRE NORTH & STOKE-ON-TRENT BIDDULPH OFFICE) - (6:15PM)**

Individual presentations for Biddulph and Cheadle Citizens Advice Bureaux had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. Each presentation contained details on volunteers, response to Covid, statistical information, financial data, case studies and feedback from clients.

Sam Hubbard, Generalist Services Manager, introduced the presentation on behalf of the Biddulph CAB and Lindon Parr gave a verbal update for the Leek CAB. Unfortunately, Julie Billingham – Chief Officer, CAB, wasn't able to attend the meeting and gave her apologies. If members had any specific queries for her these could be emailed to the Democratic Services Team.

Discussion took place around assistance to clients when bailiffs had been instructed and costs levied. In response to queries around increased on-line fraud and face-to-face appointments, the Panel was advised although on-line fraud had increased nationally, they hadn't noticed an increase locally. Appointments in person were limited to those that it was essential for and the use of the larger meeting rooms at Moorlands House would be investigated.

It was noted that the CAB provided a service from the cabins at Werrington Library and funding was currently being sourced to fund a vehicle which would visit communities and provide an alternative way to access the CAB.

Councillors passed on their thanks for the excellent work carried out by the CAB staff.

DECIDED: That the update be **NOTED**.

85 **SUPPORT STAFFORDSHIRE UPDATE PRESENTATION. (6:45PM)**

Jill Norman - North Staffordshire Operations Manager, provided a presentation to members which covered the following topics:

- An overview of the organisation
- The offer available to voluntary and community group
- Advice
- Contact details for the Moorlands Team
- Community Group support
- Arts Forum support
- "Outside" – Creative People and Places, Arts England

Members were pleased to hear that Support Staffordshire had been commissioned to provide the Healthwatch contract and that they were locally based. The detail on how the contract would be delivered was still being finalised but the organisation's approach would be to provide a more focussed community based service.

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Examples of community groups which had struggled to exist during the pandemic were described by members and the Officer asked for these groups to be referred to her organisation for assistance and also encouraged people to become members to receive their monthly newsletters. Discussion took place around revitalisation of community groups, publicity, succession planning and the impact of national/regional charities being awarded contracts to deliver services.

The number of young volunteers had increased and it was important they were encouraged and offered training. The Staffordshire Council of Volunteer Youth Service (SCVYS), were best placed to support younger volunteers.

The Panel was advised that quarterly locality forums were advertised on the website and on social media.

Jill was thanked for the informative presentation and for the support her organisation had given to community groups in the area.

DECIDED: That the presentation be received.

86 **YOUR HOUSING GROUP - REGULAR PERFORMANCE UPDATE. (7:15PM)**

Members considered a briefing paper introduced by Kelly Tasker – Service Manager Housing Operations South, which provided a performance and development update on YHG business areas identified in the legacy agreement and related to business activity between April 2021 and September 2021. Aaron Hamersley – Head of Housing, Dave Lovatt – Regional Housing Manager, Paula Marshall Director of Housing and Customer Service and Conan McKinley - Director of Asset Strategy were present at the meeting. Two customer representatives; Cheryl Ballan and Andrea Hampton were also in attendance. Apologies had been received from George Wallace.

Topics covered within the report included:

- Your Housing Group Response to Covid 19
- Housing Management
- Neighbourhood inspection and Customer Engagement Events
- Money Advice Support
- Lettings
- Compliance
- Development
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Asset improvement
- Digital Engagement
- Community Regeneration
- Commercial update

Clarity was sought around the actual number of new houses built and more detail on the new staffing structure was requested

Around letting performance, it was felt that the target of 28.5 days was a long period of time for properties to be re-let. Officers explained that performance had been impacted by Covid-19 and been affected with shortages of labour and materials to complete void repair works.

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It was queried as to whether any of the properties planned on Sunninghill Drive, Leek would be available to rent once the site had been developed. Colleagues from the Development Team at YHG would look into this and confirm after the meeting.

A member of the Panel raised his concerns in relation to the length of time an elderly tenant had waited for the heating and hot water to be reinstated and the unsightly damp patches on the relatively new properties at Cellarhead was noted.

The organisation was thanked for the engagement with members in regards to the Bellevue Flats, the excellent communication and local knowledge of David Lovatt – Regional Housing Manager, and for the support a councillor had received with the installation of swift boxes. She asked if it would be possible to consider the roll-out of the boxes in other areas of the Moorlands.

With reference to the ongoing structural works at Daisy Haye and the annual service charge paid by residents, Officers confirmed that the works were due to come to end shortly and had included the replacement of the cladding. Members were assured that the cost of the works had not been passed on in the service charge to residents. However, increased costs of utility bills for communal areas within the building may be passed on to customers in the future.

Cheryl Ballan – YHG Customer Representative, advised the Panel that following concerns in relation to the handling of complaints, the policy had been amended. Customers were now allocated a single point of contact and direct contact number for the person handling their complaint.

At the request of the Panel, Conan McKinley - Director of Asset Strategy, provided a presentation on the organisation's approach to climate change and planned investment. The topics covered included:

- Current Performance & Scale of the challenge
- Funding
- Retrofit
- Smart Technology
- Planned Investment (Overall and for the Staffordshire Moorlands)

Members were pleased with YHG's commitment to climate change and wished to receive regular updates on the work undertaken by the organisation. More information was requested on heat source pumps and if consideration could be given to a pilot community heating scheme in the area.

Discussion took place around energy performance assessments for each house, policies for renewable energy and plans for the management of green spaces and increased biodiversity.

Although gas boilers would no longer be installed in new build properties from 2025, and alternative heating solutions were being considered, some members felt this time period was too long.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance at the meeting.

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DECIDED: -

- 1) The performance update be noted;
- 2) That the Climate Change and Planned Investment presentation be circulated to members;
- 3) Confirmation of the actual numbers of homes built and a detailed staff structure to be provided after the meeting;
- 4) For members to notify the Democratic Services Team the specific details of the heating/hot water repair and location of the damp properties in Cellarhead to enable YHG to investigate.

87 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE (7:45PM)

Councillor Porter – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity, was in attendance at the meeting to provide a verbal update following a request made by the Chair. As agreed at the last meeting, an annual update would be provided to the Panel, along with 6 monthly progress updates.

Activities carried out since November included the following key areas:-

- Anthesis had submitted their draft report on emissions from the Council's procurement of services and items
- The Council has produced an easy-to-read summary of its Climate Change Strategy with the assistance of the Plain English Society and had commissioned two animated explainer videos that would be made available on the Council's website.
- Support Staffordshire had also been commissioned to support local, community-based action to help deliver the Council's Climate Change Strategy. This would include administering a Community Climate Change and Nature Emergency fund on behalf of the Council from April 2022.
- Key stakeholder workshops had taken place and two further sessions were planned with community organisations, town and parish councils and businesses.
- The Council proposed to use the Greenhouse Gas Accounting Tool that was developed by 'Local Partnerships' in association with the LGA to monitor Council emissions and would continue to measure using the Scatter methodology developed by Anthesis.

Members appreciated the update and thanked Councillor Porter and David Smith for their attendance at the meeting.

A written summary of the verbal report was requested by the Panel, along with a section on the website where achievements and progress in regards to climate change could be demonstrated.

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The publication date of the Council's Tree Strategy was queried and it was confirmed that this would be part of the Nature Recovery Strategy. A climate change page was available on the Council's website and it was noted that improvements could be made.

It was proposed by Councillor Yates and seconded by Councillor Taylor that the Climate Change Sub-Groups be reconvened, for each group to meet twice per year and for Councillor Porter to attend when possible. A vote was taken and the Panel approved the recommendation.

The Portfolio Holder explained, that sub groups were task and finish, this Panel had responsibility for the scrutiny of the Climate Change Strategy and efforts should be focussed on the implementation of the Strategy and engagement with the community.

DECIDED:

- 1) That the update be **NOTED** and a written summary of the verbal report be circulated to members;
- 2) The Panel **RECOMMENDED** that the Climate Change Sub-Groups be reconvened.

88 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC.**

89 **TO APPROVE THE EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING.**

DECIDED: That the exempt minutes of the previous meeting be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

_____ Chairman _____ Date