

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

SERVICE DELIVERY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

WEDNESDAY, 16 MARCH 2022

PRESENT: Councillor I Herdman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: J Aberley, G Bentley, C Brady, J Davies, B Emery, K Flunder, N Hawkins, K Hoptroff, B A Hughes, L Page, H Plimley and P Roberts.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors: M Bowen, B Cawley, M Gledhill, A Hart, T Holmes, J T Jones, L A Malyon, K Martin, I Plant, S E Ralphs MBE, P Routledge, S Scalise, L Swindlehurst, N Yates and J Porter.

APOLOGIES: Councillors R Ward, D Price, J Redfern, J Salt, H Sheldon MBE and P Wood

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

The following substitutions were made: -

Councillor Holmes for Councillor Ward
Councillor Gledhill for Councillor Price
Councillor Routledge for Councillor Sheldon
Councillor Yates for Councillor Salt
Councillor Malyon for Councillor Wood

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

DECIDED: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 January 2022, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

Members discussed the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, the role of the District Council in relation to housing refugees and the feasibility of the Council providing financial assistance.

The Chair asked for any suggestions or comments to be emailed to the Democratic Services Team. An outline document had been produced by the Labour Group which was given to a member of staff during the meeting.

The point was stressed for town and parish councils to be included in any communication in regards to this matter.

28 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:-**

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Agenda No.	Member Declaring Interest	Nature of Interest
Agenda Item 6 – Questions to Portfolio Holders	Cllr Bentley	Other – Lengthsman for Cheadle.
Agenda Item 8 – Parkwood Leisure Performance Update	Cllr Routledge	Other – Daughter assists at the Paddles Swimming Club.

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

Question received from Councillor Hoptroff: -

Q1. “What is the time scale for work on the Trestle Market alterations and when is this due to start?”

Response from Councillor Ralphs, The Leader:

This project was part of the regeneration of Leek town centre. The Market Hall would be modernised to increase the number of stalls and respond to requests received from young people and shop keepers to increase footfall following the pandemic. Cabinet had complied with requests made when the last market report was called in by members and a further report would be considered by Cabinet at the end of March 2022.

By way of supplementary questions, Councillor Hoptroff requested that Scooter Fest be allowed use of the Market Hall for its event on 22 May 2022. In response, Councillor Ralphs confirmed that the event organisers had been advised last year that they could no longer use the Market Hall for the event. However, the event could still be held and the Council had offered the use of the car parks, gazebos and the Churnet Room.

Councillor Hoptroff felt that the Churnet Room was not a feasible option for the event as many visitors would have to cross Stockwell Street and requested for a comprehensive consultation to be undertaken. The Leader advised that there was a pedestrian crossing to ensure the road could be crossed safely and that consultation had already been carried out.

Question received from Councillor Malyon: -

Q2. “Could you tell me why or if it is true that Scooter Fest cannot use the Trestle Market when the event happens on 22/5/22?”

With reference to Scooter Fest being held in the Market Hall for the event in May, if the works hadn't commenced, Councillor Ralphs commented that a finely balanced programme of works would start as soon as possible. Once completed, the newly refurbished Market Hall would benefit traders, customers and visitors as it would provide a more interesting shopping experience. The use of the current Trestle Market was not integral to the success of the Scooter Fest event.

Question received from Councillor Page:-

Q3. “What process does SMDC follow when it receives a request from a community organisation to use Council facilities and buildings? Please could the response be provided in writing so that the Panel have this minuted?”

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Response from Councillor Ralphs, The Leader:

The relevant department to contact was the Assets Team which was managed by Katy Webster.

Clarity was sought around the decision making process for the hire of assets owned by the Council. Members were advised that requests would be received by the Assets Team which would then be sent to Councillor Hart – Portfolio Holder for Property & Tourism. His recommendation would then be discussed with Cabinet and implemented as soon as possible.

Question received from Councillor Bentley:-

Q4. “When are these areas in Leek and Cheadle going to be cleaned up, as visitors and residents of the Moorlands don't want to see this when they shop in our towns.” (a number of photographs had been circulated to members of the Panel)

Response from Councillor Hart – Portfolio Holder for Property & Tourism:-

Most of the photos appear to relate to weed growth in the block paved areas around the Market Street car park, Leek . Generally, the service arrangements with AES are required to apply a herbicide treatment to all the pay and display car parks twice a year across the Staffordshire Moorlands. This tends to be undertaken in the drier months of May and then again in August to provide best coverage throughout the main growing season. A number of the photos show evidence of the last treatment (as the vegetation is browned and lying flat). Warmer winters do provide a habitat for continued weed growth but at a much less vigorous rate than experienced in the summer. More than two applications of herbicide are not usually recommended for environmental reasons. The area at the side of the market hall and entrance to the butter market off Derby street has been added to our weed killing schedule for 2022 by the markets team.

Some of the street furniture within the car parks, such as bollards and planters cause issues of access for the mechanical sweepers. The AES team have already started to target these areas in advance of a “Spring Clean” and will seek to remove the accumulations identified in the photos. Throughout the winter the frequency of cleansing is reduced as AES teams are diverted onto gritting duties when the conditions dictate this action must be prioritised.

AES will be targeting the identified car parks with jet washers over the coming weeks to clean up the signage and the areas targeted as part of the spring clean before they treat the areas with herbicide.

We can advise that Leek Town Council employ a lengths man but we are not aware of the town council's work programme. In addition Cheadle Town Council do submit an invoice for £400 annually as part of the lengthsman scheme to the council (via AES) and they state on their invoice that this is for works around the Town Centre. The types of issues identified in the photos could be tackled via the lengthsman function.

Councillor Hart suggested that this matter could have been dealt with as a service request to the department or to him directly.

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DECIDED: That the Panel's Work Programme be agreed, subject to, an item being added on the delivery of business units within the area.

31 **PARKWOOD ANNUAL PERFORMANCE UPDATE - FRANCOIS SMIT, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PARKWOOD LEISURE (PRESENTATION) (7.15PM)**

The Panel received a presentation on the following topics:-

- Recovery following the pandemic
- Supply chain and recruitment challenges
- Digital improvements for customers
- Financial performance
- Social value generated annually across the contact during 2019/20
- Contract highlights
- Memberships
- Growth of the Swim School
- Social Media
- Customer feedback
- Maintenance/capital investment
- Carbon reduction and utility management
- Active Communities

Members asked questions and commented as below: -

Solar Panels at Biddulph Valley Leisure Centre - Some members felt that it was a missed opportunity not to install solar panels during the replacement of the roof. Consideration had been given to the installation of solar panels and the repairs to the roof were part of the Capital Investment Programme which had been instructed by the Council. Going forward the Leisure Transformation Programme would include a review of the sites and ensure the sites were as green as possible.

Impact of increased energy prices to customers - This would increase pricing for some leisure services but there were internal targets to reduce energy usage and use greener technology.

Percentage of the swim timetable which was dedicated to public swims and affordability of lessons – Swimming lessons ran from 4pm - 6.30pm during the week, therefore public swimming was available before and after these times. At the weekend, there were 3 hours per day dedicated to public swimming at each leisure centre. The actual percentages could be provided after the meeting via email.

Possible reduction in lane swimming – Parkwood constantly reviewed its programmes and lane swimming remained popular. Where possible, the pools could accommodate lane and general swimming.

2020/21 figures – These figures were not included in the update as the sites were closed for the majority of this time but the information was available should this be required.

Discussion also took place around customers being deterred from accessing the facilities due to the increased cost of living, the importance of all children being able to swim, open days and the recruitment of an Active Communities Manager.

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The Chair thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

DECIDED: That the performance update be noted.

32 **CALL-IN OF THE CABINET DECISION - CAR PARKING STRATEGY (7.45PM)**

Mrs Helen Bridgett provided a verbal statement to the Panel in relation to the submission of the petition to oppose the charge period (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) and the increased parking tariffs in Leek.

At its last meeting, Cabinet received the newly drafted Staffordshire Moorlands Car Parking Strategy, after it had been debated in detail by the Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 26 January 2022. This followed consideration by the cross-party Car Park Working Group at a number of meetings during 2021. The Strategy and associated investment plans were generally supported by the Panel. Members did however recommend that Cabinet should review the Strategy 12 months after implementation to evaluate its impact and that consideration be given to defer the changes relating to the revised charging period in Cheadle.

Cabinet approved the adoption of the Car Parking Strategy, subject to,

- the Strategy being reviewed 12 months after implementation to evaluate its impact.
- That the proposed charge period (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) and the associated free half an hour / one hour concessions be deferred in Cheadle. The present charge period to be retained (9:30 am to 3:30 pm) subject to a further review later in the year when the outcomes from the High Streets Task Force / Masterplan Development are known.

The key findings, recommendations and action plan within the Strategy were noted and the following actions approved:

- a. That the tariffs set out in section 8.13 of the report for the new financial year be implemented.
- b. That a tourist parking pass be created and permits be reviewed to ensure more flexibility for customers.
- c. That Pay by Phone across SMDC car parks to facilitate cashless and contactless payments be implemented as soon as possible.
- d. That the current ticket machines be replaced on a phased base, reducing where possible, to include contactless and card payment options.
- e. That a bespoke SMDC EV strategy be progressed and developed working collaboratively with Staffordshire County Council and their consultants.
- f. That short stay and long stay areas on Cheadle Tape Street car park and tariff changes be created, updating the SMDC parking order accordingly.
- g. That the creation of a new officer position within the Assets Service to strategically manage car parking across the Alliance and implement the action plan and strategy over the course of the next 5 years be noted.

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- h. That appropriate funds be allocated to improve signage and wayfinding on the car parks.

During the meeting of Council on 23 February 2022, a petition to oppose the charge period (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) and the increased parking tariffs in Leek was received.

The Leader advised that the Strategy had been altered and free parking would be available in Leek before 9:30am and after 3:30pm. However, the new short free parking periods on certain car parks within the Strategy in Leek would be abolished and the new tariffs implemented.

Call-in requests had been received from Councillors: -
M. Gledhill, K. Hoptroff, L. Page, D. Price, C. Atkins, L. Swindlehurst, B. Cawley, P. Taylor and S. Coleman.

The call-in request confirmed the following principles of decision making which they believed had not been adhered to and the reasons they had not been followed:

- Taking due regard of all relevant considerations and disregarding irrelevant considerations- The decision to implement the strategy at this time does not sufficiently take into account the local economic circumstances for businesses and residents at the beginning of the COVID recovery.
- Taken on the basis of due consultation and professional advice from Officers - The outcomes of the consultation done in Feb 21 by the consultants regarding Leek seem to contrast sharply with public opinion being expressed now. Also, the consultants state that “ the biggest response came from Cheadle”. Covid restrictions meant that there were no public face to face consultations and that attendance at workshops could well have been affected. These points cast doubts on the assumptions made at that time. This should be revisited.
- Respect for human rights and equalities - The lack of the ‘free half hour’ in the leek car parks closest to the centre discriminates against those with walking difficulties, who do not have a disability blue badge.
- A presumption in favour of openness - At the Jan 22 meeting of Services Scrutiny, The Chair did offer a subsequent meeting to have further discussion. This has not happened but we feel that this would be beneficial. A call in would facilitate this.

Members debated the points raised both in the Cabinet and Call-in reports, particularly around the use of consultants for this strategy. The Panel also recommended that the Car Parking Working Group be reconvened.

The matter was then put to a named vote as follows:-

In favour of the Call-in:

Councillors: Brady, Davies, Hawkins, Hoptroff, Page, Gledhill and Yates (7)

Against the Call-in:

Councillors: Aberley, Bentley, Emery, Flunder, Herdman, Hughes, Plimley, Roberts, Routledge, Holmes and Malyon (11)

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DECIDED: For the decision not to be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration.

In accordance with the procedure for consideration of Call-ins at Overview & Scrutiny Panel meetings where the Call-in was not successful, the Cabinet were asked to note or take account of concerns as it saw fit without holding up the implementation of the decision.

33 **REVISED PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL ASSISTANCE POLICY
2021-26 - MIKE TOWERS, SENIOR HOUSING OFFICER. (8.15PM)**

Both this report and the item on the Transfer of the Management of the Countryside Sites would be considered at another meeting as the Panel decided to adjourn the meeting at this point.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

_____Chairman_____Date