

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillor G Heath (Chair)

Councillors C Atkins, M Gledhill, T Hall, N Hawkins, T Holmes,
K Hoptroff, T Riley, P Routledge, P Wilkinson and N Yates

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors P Roberts and Routledge

APOLOGIES: Councillors M Bowen, K J Jackson and L A Malyon

66 **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS, IF ANY**

Councillor Hoptroff was substitute member for Councillor Kevin Jackson.

67 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

DECIDED: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 July 2022 be **APPROVED** and signed by the Chair.

68 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:**

No declarations of interests were made.

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

There were none.

70 **QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, IF ANY**

1. Question received from Councillor Atkins:

“What budget has been allocated to the renewal of the CCTV system throughout the Staffordshire Moorlands? In which years will these resources be spent?”

Response from Councillor Ward – Portfolio Holder for Communities and Councillor Worthington for Finance:

A budget of £212,000 has been allocated to the renewal of the CCTV system with the expenditure planned to occur in this financial year.

By way of supplementary questions, Councillor Atkins wished to ascertain when and how the budget would be spent along with the number of cameras which were functioning correctly. She had concerns for the safety of the community and it was important for the Council to ensure it received value for money from the company contracted to supply the CCTV.

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In response, it was confirmed that the Council was working with the contactor to ensure obligations were met and contingency plans were in place should this not be achieved.

Councillor Ward – Portfolio Holder for Communities, would reply to all of the points raised in writing to Councillor Atkins.

71 **WORK PROGRAMME**

It was commented that there were a number of items to be allocated to a meeting and that the Empty Homes Strategy should be prioritised. Since the publication of the Work Programme, this item was scheduled for consideration at the meeting in November.

DECIDED: That the Work Programme for 2022-23 be agreed.

72 **1ST QUARTER FINANCIAL, PROCUREMENT & PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2022/23**

The report informed members of the Council's overall performance and financial position for the period ended 30th June ("First Quarter 2022/23"). Detailed analysis was provided in the appendices to the report and the overall position was summarised in paragraph 3.3 of the report.

The Head of Finance, provided an explanation for the reason the Additional Restriction Grant Funding of £89,060 had to be returned to central government. This grant was specifically for the impact of Covid-19 and had been publicised to ensure take-up was maximised.

A member highlighted the targets around procurement and the importance of contracts being awarded to local businesses. Martin Owen – Executive Director Finance and Customer Service, agreed to investigate how the Council could increase the number of local businesses on the Frameworks.

In response to a query relating to the General Fund, the Panel was advised that it represented the budget for the Street Cleansing Service which was delivered by Alliance Environmental Services.

The expected date for the outcome of the Rail Feasibility Study would be provided to the Panel after the meeting along with clarification as to the reason the development sites at Wharf Road and Tunstall Road in Biddulph had been delayed.

Councillor Roberts gave assurance that plans relating to redundant mills would incorporate all areas within the Staffordshire Moorlands.

Discussion took place around the outcome of the Levelling Up Fund Bids and uncertainty, particularly in relation to Cheadle Leisure Centre.

It was queried whether the Brough Park Improvement Plan included a bid for toilet facilities. The Park regularly attracted large numbers of people, the toilet facilities were poor and the facilities available at the Leisure Centre were not sufficient. A suggestion was made for the Disabled Facilities Grant to be awarded for the extension of the existing disabled toilet into a Changing Place facility.

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Councillor Atkins requested for the Bowling Green maintenance specification to be sent to her and Councillor Roberts confirmed that he was also looking into this matter and the documentation would be provided.

In response to a query in relation to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust's ability to deliver its commitment around green infrastructure, the Leader confirmed that Councillor Porter had arranged a meeting with the organisation and a response would be provided to Councillor Hoptroff after the meeting. Councillor Roberts would also send an update on the latest position on the transfer of the management of the Countryside Sites.

A member of the Panel advised that the Green Infrastructure Strategy Group hadn't met for some time and the matter had been raised with the Chief Executive.

DECIDED:

- 1) The Panel **NOTED** the First Quarter 2022/23 financial, procurement and performance position detailed in Appendices A, B and C and summarised at 3.3 the report.

73 **PROCUREMENT STRATEGY (WITHDRAWN)**

Since the publication of the agenda, this item had been withdrawn.

74 **REVISED LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME**

The report informed members of the Council's intention to undertake a consultation with both the public and the Major Precepting Authorities in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1st April 2023.

Each year the Council was required to review its Council Tax Reduction Scheme in accordance with the requirements of the schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to either maintain the scheme or replace it.

Council Tax Reduction (CTR) was introduced from 1 April 2013 when it replaced the Central Government funded Council Tax Benefit regime. From its inception, the funding available to the Council from government had reduced year on year.

As with the majority of authorities within England, the District Council needed to make changes to the CTR scheme for working age applicants (the scheme for pension age applicants is prescribed by Central Government) in order to reduce the significant administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit.

This report requests permission to consult on changes proposed to the scheme and makes recommendation to members for the 2023/24 scheme.

The new scheme would contain additional provisions to protect individuals who experienced exceptional hardship and would encourage those to apply for an exceptional hardship payment.

Members had the opportunity to make comment and ask questions such as:

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- For the Council to work proactively with the people negatively impacted by the introduction of the new scheme and remove the requirement to apply for the Hardship Fund. The Head of Revenues and Benefits agreed to look into award without an application.
- If there was flexibility around the income limits within the bands, particularly for those on zero hour contracts. Tapering would add complexity and the proposed scheme would better suit customers as they would remain in a band unless there was a significant change to their income.

The Council would review the outcomes of the consultation prior to the recommendation being finalised and staff would receive the appropriate training to support customers in the roll out of the new scheme.

DECIDED:

- 1) The Panel **RECOMMENDED** Cabinet gave **APPROVAL** to the Council to consult with the public and Major Precepting Authorities on the introduction of a new income banded / grid scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2023, to reduce the significant administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit and to increase the overall level of support for the lowest income families.

75 **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Panel considered a report which provided councillors with a summary of the work undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels during 2021 – 2022.

During 2021/22, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels continued to scrutinise performance internally/externally, held the Cabinet to account and contributed to policy development. The range of work and issues considered by each Panel during 2021/22 were summarised in sections 6 - 9 of the report. Appendix A of the report contained the terms of reference of each Panel and its membership.

Members thanked the officers for the comprehensive report.

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

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

DECIDED:

That, pursuant to Section 100A(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 100 I (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Paragraphs indicated.

77 **APPLICATION FOR THE WRITE-OFF OF NON RECOVERABLE DEBTS**

Members gave consideration to the write off of non-recoverable debts.

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_____Chairman _____Date