

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

MONDAY, 16 JANUARY 2023

PRESENT: Councillor D Shaw (Chair)

Councillors G Bentley, A Hart, I Herdman, T Holmes, K Hoptroff,
B A Hughes, B Johnson, J Jones, T Riley, P Routledge,
Z Routledge, L Swindlehurst, P Taylor and N Yates

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor C Atkins, M Gledhill, J Porter, J Salt, R Ward and
P Roberts

IN ATTENDANCE:

APOLOGIES: Councillors K Mills

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

There were none.

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

DECIDED:

That the minutes from the previous meeting held on 14 November 2022 be approved.

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

No urgent items had been received.

The Vice-Chair advised that she had received a query from a member of the public relating to Your Housing Group which would be dealt with during the appropriate agenda item for this organisation.

48 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:**

Agenda No.	Member Declaring Interest	Nature of Interest
Agenda Item 10 - Your Housing Group Performance Update	Cllr A Hart	Other – Is a relative of the YHG Customer Representative present at the meeting.
Agenda Item 9 - Biddulph Youth and Community Zone	Cllr J Salt	Other – Is a volunteer at Biddulph Youth and Community Zone.

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Agenda Item 8 – Police, Fire and Rescue and Crime Update	Cllr J Salt	Other – Husband is a fire fighter.
	Cllr J Porter	Other – Involved in a Community Speed Watch Scheme.

49 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, IF ANY.

No questions to Portfolio Holders had been received.

50 WORK PROGRAMME

DECIDED:

That the Work Programme for 2022/2023 be received and due to the number of items scheduled for the next meeting no further items could be added.

51 POLICE, FIRE AND RESCUE AND CRIME ANNUAL UPDATE - BEN ADAMS, STAFFORDSHIRE COMMISSIONER (VERBAL UPDATE) (6:10PM)

Members received an update which included statistical information, details of the new local policing mode, a new triage system for 101 calls, SPACE scheme and future engagement events.

The Commissioner highlighted the increase in domestic violence and that additional funding has been allocated for the provision of community services for victims.

Anti-social behaviour had decreased, vehicle theft had increased and drug crime in the area was currently being investigated. The Panel was assured that the Staffordshire Moorlands was a low crime area. Members were advised that the Commissioner was keen to work with partners, housing associations and councils. Improvements had been made to quality and timeliness of contact to the Police.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and comment as follows:

- The new local policing model was welcomed, the level of service had improved and members sought reassurance for this model to be retained.
- Despite best efforts of PCSOs, anti-social behaviour remained a problem in town centres and more severe penalties should be issued.
- Whether the spend on domestic abuse community services was within the remit of the Police.
- Possible reintroduction of the crash course for 16 – 19 year olds to reduce deaths on roads.
- For domestic abuse services to also take into account male victims.
- If there were plans to expand the community speed watch scheme
- Suggestion for officers to be provided with electric bikes or smaller less expensive vehicles
- Improved technology and access to CCTV footage.

DECIDED:

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- 1) That the update be received;
- 2) For any further questions for the Commissioner to be submitted to the Democratic Services Team.

52 **POLICE, FIRE AND RESCUE AND CRIME ANNUAL UPDATE - BEN ADAMS, STAFFORDSHIRE COMMISSIONER (VERBAL UPDATE) (6:10PM)**

The Youth and Community Manager had been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on the work carried out at Biddulph Youth and Community Zone (BYCZ).

BYCZ is a busy multi-use centre, mainly run by volunteers providing various community based activities and services. Twice a week, over 100 younger people regularly attended the youth club and it as hoped that funding could be secured to offer another night. To ensure the centre continued to run it was vital for funding to be constantly sourced.

Other activities held at the centre included a wellness group for men, community café, community pantry, cook and eat projects, social activities and a Fitness Club.

Members complimented the organisation for the fantastic services it provided to the community.

Discussion took place around the impact of increased utility bills for the centre and all monies being ringfenced for specific projects. The organisation may wish to make an application for Voluntary Sector Emergency Funding to assist with the replacement of the broken boiler.

DECIDED:

That the update be received.

53 **YOUR HOUSING GROUP 6 MONTHLY UPDATE (7:10PM)**

Members considered a briefing paper introduced by Dave Lovatt - Regional Housing Manager, which provided a performance and development update on YHG business areas identified in the legacy agreement and related to business activity between August 2022 and December 2022. Aaron Hamersley – Head of Housing , Paula Marshall Director of Housing and Customer Service and Adrian Mostyn – Head of Repairs and Maintenance were present at the meeting. A customer representative was also present - Andrea Hampton.

The Panel was reminded that members had been invited to a meeting with YHG due to take place on 21 Feb 2023 at Daisy Hays in Leek. During the meeting any specific concerns could be discussed and members could hear about current work/projects being carried out by YHG. A view would then be taken as to how regularly this meeting would be held in the future. The venue for the meetings would rotate between the towns and there were plans to reintroduce surgeries for customers to attend.

Topics covered within the report included:

- Your Housing Group Response to Covid 19

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- Housing Management
- YHG Key Contact Details
- Neighbourhood inspection and Customer Engagement Events
- Damp and Mould
- Tenancy Support and Money Advice Support
- Disabled Grant Facilities Update
- Energy Efficiency Update
- Lettings
- Compliance
- Development
- Repairs and Maintenance
- Digital Engagement
- Community Regeneration

The Panel had the opportunity to ask questions and comment as follows:-

Members were pleased that officers were present in person and some very good work had been carried out by the organisation in the area.

Mill Street Shops – Despite being given assurance that the works to this area would be completed by July 2022, various issues were still outstanding. There had been delays with planning consent for dropped kerbs and a further update would be provided after the meeting.

Void Properties and Repairs - The number of days properties were empty was unsatisfactory and response to repairs took too long . Some members were disappointed with the 89% customer satisfaction rate for housing repairs. A decision had been made to redeploy staff from the Void Team to the Repairs Team due to an increased demand for repairs following the Covid lockdown period. Staff had now returned to their usual duties but the organisation was now experiencing difficulties around recruitment and retention of staff which was a national issue for social landlords. Members were assured a plan was in place to catch up with void properties and improve housing repairs.

New Housing – There was disappointment in relation to the number of new houses built, there had been issues commencing new housing schemes but a meeting was planned with senior officers to explore opportunities for new housing in the area.

A written response would be provided for the number of properties retrofitted and upgraded to meet minimum energy performance standards

Priority neighbourhood work at Belle Vue, Leek – The local councillor was pleased to have joined the team here and suggested that tenants could be more actively involved. Improved customer engagement included flyers being issued to residents, YHG officers were more regularly on-site and an event was planned once the works had been completed.

Tenancy arrears due to cost of living – A small increase in arrears had been noted which was monitored closely.

Uplands, Biddulph – YHG advised that the Grounds Maintenance Team would be engaged here during Spring/Summer.

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YHG Key Contact Details – The list would be updated to include contact telephone numbers.

Emergency repairs for elderly and vulnerable tenants – A councillor had previously been advised the response time was 4 hours for these tenants and had not received a written response to a particular case he was involved with. Another member of the Panel had been re-assured by the response received to emergency repairs at properties within her area. Written clarification (copied to the Leader & Chair) of the response time would be supplied after the meeting.

Compensation for temporary use fan heaters - It was confirmed that this was contained within the compensation policy procedure and where such heaters had been supplied, this would be highlighted to residents.

Slater Street and Edge View Court, Biddulph – This area was the responsibility of YHG and it was confirmed that this area would be maintained.

Work Clubs – A client had received excellent service and this would be fed back to the team.

A request was made for the derelict garages and broken zipwire in Cheadle to be investigated .

Discussion also took place around the frequency of scrutiny and whether YHG was sufficiently scrutinised, management of anti-social behaviour, apprenticeship schemes and installation of solar panels.

The Leader of the Council thanked the YHG Officers for attending the meeting. As part of YHG's ongoing commitment to improve the service in the area, more regular meetings were planned to take place at each of the towns.

DECIDED:

- 1) That the performance update be received and comments noted.
- 2) Updates/responses to be provided after the meeting in relation to:-
 - Mill Street Shops
 - Emergency repairs response times
 - Number of properties retrofitted and upgraded to meet minimum energy performance standards
- 3) For telephone numbers to be incorporated into the Key Contact List.

54

CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN REVIEW - DAVID SMITH, HEAD OF COMMUNITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE (7:40PM)

The Panel considered a report which reviewed the progress towards delivering the Council's Climate Change Strategy and identified priority activities for 2023 to 2024.

The report set out the activities under the 7 themes of the Climate Change Plan for 2023/4.

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Some of the activities would deliver real emissions reductions and improvement to nature, whilst others would be enabling work to assess opportunities, barriers and pathways.

The Council developed a comprehensive and ambitious strategy for achieving its ambition of both the Council and District becoming Net Zero by 2030. The Council recognised that meeting this target, particularly across the district, would be extremely challenging. In part, this was because of the limited direct impact the Council could have on district-wide emissions and also because local reductions in emissions would be reliant on national and international targets being achieved.

Discussions at the Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel and with key stakeholders, including Moorlands Climate Action, had emphasised the importance of targeting our limited resources on the areas where we can have the greatest impact. In response, it was proposed that the focus in 2023//24 would be on domestic energy, nature initiatives and engaging young people. This was in addition to on-going work to reduce the Council's direct emissions and supporting community groups.

Members appreciated this was a difficult task and some matters were not within the control of the Council. However, an analysis of the Council's achievements was expected and a document produced by Moorlands Climate Action (MCA) was referred to.

The work carried out by the Climate Change Sub-Committees was discussed and the possibility of these meetings being re-convened.

Some members were of the opinion that more action should have been taken on matters within the control of the Council, since its commitment to becoming net zero by 2030. Specific data and evidence on the reduction of carbon saving was requested.

Members debated green energy and the procurement of the Council's energy contract, pilot programs, transport & industry, supplementary planning documents/local plan, potential loss of wildlife corridor at Cecilly Brook and assessment of projects.

Suggestions were made around innovative ideas for rural bus schemes and active travel. The future of Moorlands House and the installation of LED lighting was discussed.

An issue in relation to the nature work at Biddulph Valley Way was highlighted and for the contact details for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to be provided.

More transparency around the work of the Staffordshire Sustainability Board was requested and it was confirmed that this meeting would be held in public from March 2023.

The Leader assured members that climate change was a priority and that the Council could have acted more rapidly in some areas. The good working relationship with MCA was noted.

DECIDED:

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That the Panel:

- 1) **NOTED** the contents of the report and
- 2) **DEFERRED** recommendation that Cabinet approve the priority activities for 2023/24, until further details were available around substantive actions, costs, evidence and measured outcomes.

55 **COST OF LIVING UPDATE**

Councillor Swindlehurst (Joint Vice-Chair - Cost of Living Working Group), updated members on the outcomes of the Working Group and highlighted the key points from the Cost of Living Update Cabinet Delegated Decision Report to the Panel .

On 4 October 2022, Cabinet considered a report on the Council's response to the energy/cost-of-living crisis. The cost-of-living crisis had also been the subject of debate at Full Council, Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at two meetings of the Cost-of-Living Working Group. Discussions had also taken place with other key statutory organisations and the voluntary sector. This report provided a further update on the actions of the Council.

Discussions had indicated that further support should be focussed in three main areas:

- Support for the Voluntary Sector (volunteers and financial challenges)
- Support for those in most need (identification of and support for the most vulnerable, mental health, digital access)
- Work with Town and Parish Councils.

In response to a query, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that each Voluntary Sector Emergency Funding application received would be assessed individually and there was no minimum or maximum amount of funding that could be applied for.

Members were advised that staff had been trained and the Staffordshire Moorlands Fuel Bank delivered in collaboration with Beat the Cold was now operational. It was noted however, that there were some issues around volunteer capacity. A suggestion was made for a member of staff to be seconded from the Council to Beat the Cold to assist with the increased demand for service.

Advice was provided to members in relation to the disconnection of energy supply and access to emergency credit during the weekend.

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

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm

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_____ Chairman _____ Date