

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

SERVICE DELIVERY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

WEDNESDAY, 1 MARCH 2023

PRESENT: Councillor I Herdman (Chair)

Councillors C Brady, S Ellis, B Emery, E Fallows, N Hawkins,
T Holmes, K Hoptroff, B Hughes, L Page, D Price, D Proudlove,
P Routledge and J Salt

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor R Ward, K Flunder, M Worthington, P Roberts, C Atkins
and L Swindlehurst

APOLOGIES: Councillors G Bentley, M Bowen, A Hart, H Plimley and P Wood

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

Councillor Z. Routledge acted a substitute for Councillor Plimley.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2023 be approved.

46 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:-**

There were no declarations of interests made.

47 **WORK PROGRAMME**

It was requested that a Housing Growth Strategy be added to the work programme.

48 **PARKWOOD ANNUAL PERFORMANCE UPDATE - FRANCOIS SMIT,
REGIONAL DIRECTOR & IAN SALES, CONTRACT MANAGER**

The Panel received the annual performance update from the Regional Director and Contract Manager of Lex Leisure. This included contract highlights, membership levels, swim school growth, customer feedback, maintenance/capital investment, carbon reduction, support for the Council's Move More Strategy, grounds maintenance projects, recovery from Covid and utility cost increases. Panel members raised issues relating to pay increases for freelance workers (further details would be provided), maintenance of bowling greens and deterrents for anti-social behaviour, levels of access for public swimming, possible use of dual use methods to increase capacity.

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RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

49 SMDC RENTERS REFORM BILL - HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

The Panel received a briefing on the Renters Reform Bill that sought to remove so-called 'no fault evictions' in the private rental sector, creating increased security for those choosing this tenure option. It further sought to address maintenance and quality of maintenance within the sector, bringing standards in line with those of social housing.

Panel members raised issues relating to the potential for tenants to be evicted before the enactment of the legislation, issues with regards to the supply of affordable housing and powers of enforcement in the private rented sector.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

50 SMDC HOMELESSNESS REVIEW & STRATEGY - HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

The report advised the Panel in relation to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023- 2027 and sought approval to undertake consultation. The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) placed a statutory duty on local authorities to undertake a review of homelessness and use those findings to develop a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. The review identified local trends and challenges to inform priorities and actions within the strategy, which set out a proactive partnership approach to address and prevent homelessness.

Members discussed issues relating to domestic violence, the costs related to rough sleeping, the supply of affordable housing connected to the strategy and difficulties in delivering such homes as part of planning permission conditions.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted and that Cabinet be recommended to approve consultation (Appendix C) in connection with the Homelessness Review (Appendix A) and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023- 2027 (Appendix B).

51 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, IF ANY.

Q1. Received from Cllr Proudlove

“What plans do the SMDC regeneration team have to engage with Biddulph members and Biddulph Town Council to develop a programme of projects and initiatives for Biddulph in order to capitalise on any future funding opportunities?”

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Tourism

“We value the working relationship we have we all our communities and the regeneration team work across the whole of the Staffordshire Moorlands area to ensure opportunities can be accessed by all.

You will remember that we were successful in securing over £3m though UK Shared Prosperity Fund Staffordshire Moorlands. The funding will support a wide range of interventions as set out in the Investment Plan for the District and I’m thrilled to confirm that this includes investment in capacity building and infrastructure support.

Through this funding, we aim to grow the local social economy, including for community businesses, cooperatives and social enterprises, including the creation of jobs within the sector. With the funding, the Regeneration Team will bring on board a competent social enterprise support provider to work with existing community businesses in Staffordshire Moorlands to provide advice on their growth and business planning. This will involve assisting them with the development of a business case to apply for a grant from the Staffordshire Moorlands UKSPF which must create new jobs and safeguard existing jobs within the organisation.

In addition to opportunities within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund we support our Towns and Parish Councils through the Parish Forum work.”

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder would reply with regards to officers time spent on the Levelling Up Fund bid and that a meeting would take place at Biddulph Town Hall on 15 March with regards to the UKSPF, the rural fund and the Outside initiative. The review of strategic land holdings would include options for the delivery of affordable housing.

Q2. Received from Cllr Swindlehurst

“Reflecting on the agreed Tourism Strategy, alongside the need to maintain our day-to-day business efficiently and effectively, does the Council have an agreed operational plan to deliver this transformation?”

Response from the Portfolio Holder for Tourism

“I’m delighted that the Tourism Strategy was approved at Cabinet in February. The Strategy was developed with support from key partners and stakeholders and will help to ensure Staffordshire Moorlands is recognised for all it has to offer tourists and visitors; including market towns and villages, ancient river valleys, canals and reservoirs as well as the Alton Towers Resort.

We want that commitment to collaboration to continue so an important action identified within the Strategy is to establish a Tourism Partnership Forum. This will bring together key organisations involved in the Staffordshire Moorland’s visitor economy to oversee progress against the key objectives and actions set out in the Strategy. The focus of the Forum will be to align priorities, programmes and activities, identify and take opportunities to enhance and build on what each organisation is doing and potentially establish new collaborations or projects which cut across geographical or organisational boundaries.

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Further, it is vital that the Tourism Partnership Forum is abreast of activity taking place beyond District level to ensure a joined up approach and effective engagement hence we will make sure that valuable information at county, regional and national level is fed into the Forum.

The Regeneration Team also fulfil an important role supporting event organisers to deliver and bring new events to the District that help to increase dwell time and encourage more visitors to stay overnight.”

In response to supplementary questions it was confirmed that there was a dedicated officer to oversee the implementation of the Tourism Strategy who would be supplemented by other members of the Regeneration team and that council process for events (room hire and risk assessments) would be reviewed for use by voluntary groups.

Q3. Received from Cllr Atkins

“What scrutiny is carried out by SMDC of the employment practices of businesses that are paid to deliver services on behalf of the Council? How are businesses which deliver services, such as, leisure centres, grounds maintenance and dustbin and recycling collections held to account for the way they treat their staff. What is the procedure by which elected councillors may raise concerns about inappropriate employment practices by businesses used to deliver services on behalf of SMDC.”

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder for Communities stated that he would consider the proposal for employees of council controlled companies to report HR issues to SMDC and that Whistle-blowing policies should be in place. Councillor were also welcome to report issues they were aware of to the relevant Head of Service for which an objective assessment could then be made.

Response from the Leader of the Council

“The Council has a range of processes and management systems in place to select, manage and scrutinise companies that are engaged to deliver services on our behalf and a summary of these is provided below:

Procurement and selection

When completing a competitive selection process to appoint an external contractor to deliver services on behalf of the Council, the following criteria is used for our own due diligence when assessing the suitability of providers of supplies, services or work that is undertaken on a basis that is proportionate to the nature and value of the contract.

Our Procurement SQ (Supplier Questionnaire) includes the following Qualification criteria for evidence based assessment:

- SME – what size of organisation they are and what is the % of staff turnover to determine if staff retention is evidence or if a high turnover then we ask for more detail behind this.
- Insurances – do they have the required insurances in place inc. Employee Liability Insurance.

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- Equalities and employment (we don't specifically request Living wage as opposed to Min wage as standard – but we 'reward' suppliers with higher scoring in the evaluation process who offer more positive benefits to their employees)
- Modern Slavery Act
- H&S – Policies / continuity arrangements / Accident statistics and reportable HSE activity, declaration of fines / penalties / training / CDM Regs. More recently we have added in a specific question relating to employer support arrangements for mental health issues with their workforce – e.g. what proactive steps are employers taking to support 'healthy minds initiatives' in the workplace.
- Safeguarding / GDPR / Data Protection policies and appropriate procedures
- TUPE Regulations– for contracts that may be subject to TUPE . These are not necessarily always our own – these can be staff that are employed by a provider which then may not win the contract renewal, those staff may be subject to TUPE into the newly awarded provider. We ensure that the new provider is aware of the staff concerned that they protected under the new arrangements for transfer (conditions, pay and pensions)

Joint Venture Companies (JV's)

The JVs have direct control and ownership of employment of their direct and indirect workforce and as such should be applying and adhering to the required legislative arrangements they are responsible to, for Employment Law and Procurement. Members of the Alliance Leadership Team (ALT) are company directors and have a position on the board of these companies. Commissioning Board Structures add a further layer of scrutiny and challenge, which are attended by respective Portfolio Holder and Head of Service. JV's also attend Scrutiny Panel meetings to present on key achievements and plans for the year ahead.

Contract Management and Scrutiny

Beyond this, client meeting structures are in place for monthly contract management purposes including monitoring delivery against contractual obligations, KPI's, complaints and customer feedback. These are attended by the respective Head of Service and officer teams which support the day to day management and interface between these organisations.

Reporting Concerns

Should Elected Members have any concerns with regards to these arrangements or working conditions of employees of any company which the Council contracts with, it should be raised with the respective Head of Service and/or Cabinet member for review and investigation.”

Q4. Received from Cllr Page

“In September 2022, the Services Committee were presented with proposals to changes in the Delivery of the Disabled Facilities Grant Programme by SMDC. The proposals were approved and a 'go live' date was set for April next month. Is the new delivery programme for DFG's still on track for this date?”

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Response from the Portfolio Holder for Communities

“Yes, the new delivery programme for the Council’s DFGs is on track for commencement by 1st April as previously reported. A report confirming the detailed arrangements for delivery of the new service by Alliance Norse, in partnership with the Council, was issued by me yesterday.”

In response to supplementary questions some work would be conducted by Alliance Norse and some would be sub-contracted, internal quality checks would be in place to monitor quality and delivery timescales together with key performance indicators. This would include completion of projects and regular reports to a commissioning board and the Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel. It was also confirmed that there would be opportunities for local suppliers of trades/services.

The meeting closed at 7.50 pm

_____Chairman _____Date