

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

THURSDAY, 4 APRIL 2024

PRESENT: Councillor A Hart (Chair)

Councillors J Aberley, A Church, K Hoptroff, C Jebb, M Johnson,
L Malyon, A Parkes and P Roberts

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor L Swindlehurst, D Pascall, Martin Owen, K Flunder,
P Hughes, M Spooner, C Atkins, M Gledhill, M Swindlehurst,
C Wood and N Yates

IN ATTENDANCE:

APOLOGIES: Councillors T Holmes, D Shaw, C Smith, L Whitehouse and
M Worthington

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

The following substitutions were made:

Councillor Flunder for Councillor Holmes
Councillor P Hughes for Councillor Shaw
Councillor Pascall for Councillor Smith
Councillor Spooner for Councillor Whitehouse

41 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 February 2024, be approved.

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

There were none.

43 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:**

None were declared.

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

Question received from Councillor Salt:

Q1. Can the Portfolio Holder for Assets reassure Biddulph District Councillors that they are willing to fund the reinstatement of the miner's lamps that will be returned

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to District Council land and agree to look after their maintenance moving forwards?"

Response from Councillor Atkins Portfolio Holder for Services:

SMDC is paying for the reinstallation of the Miner's Lamps up to an agreed maximum value. The ongoing maintenance is the subject of further discussion and agreement.

Councillor Jebb advised that funding was agreed at the Moorlands Partnership Board meeting for this item.

Question received from Councillor Malyon:

Q2: Could the portfolio holder update us on how the disabled grant monies are being applied for and if they are not what is the council doing to ensure they will be spent so that people can have a better quality of life?

Response from Councillor Atkins Portfolio Holder for Services:

Applications for DFG Funding across Staffordshire are made initially to the County Council, where eligible cases are triaged and then referred directly to the relevant local authorities. At Staffordshire Moorlands, our service provider is Alliance Norse and they will then engage with the applicant to prepare the case and procure, approve, manage and pay for the required works. There are tight response times for Alliance Norse case workers and the Occupational Therapist to contact and prepare the client case, and they work in conjunction with partner organisation (N-Able) to obtain quotes and allocate work as quickly as practicable, in proportion to the complexity of the case and the scale of the adaptation.

For SMDC, the budget for 2023/24 was £1,774,000 and, based on the outturn figures for Alliance Norse year one, this budget has been exceeded by the number of applications received. This means that not only has the annual prescribed budget been accounted for, but that inroads have also been made into the Council's DFG reserve funding from previous years. Demand for adaptation funding is growing year on year and, now that we have an organisation that is effectively and quickly dealing with adaptation cases, there is no doubt that the annual funding for mandatory adaptations will be fully committed going forward.

We also have a suite of discretionary Adaptation funding to help individuals and communities access grant funding that perhaps would have been difficult to obtain under the mandatory regime, and this funding programme complements the mandatory process so that people living with disability can not only access and remain independent in their own homes, but can also take part in community activities and initiatives where community premises have applied for funding to improve access to their facilities. For 2023/24, just under £240,000 was approved for discretionary cases on top of the mandatory programme, and this is an area we are keen to expand on over the next 12 months to 2 years.

By way of a supplementary questions, Councillor Malyon asked;
How can it be promoted to ensure it is spent?

DFG is promoted by Alliance Norse who work to tight timescales to progress applications. The figures from 2023/24 applications indicate they are on track to spend the budget allocated from the government. They are monitoring the volume of applications and their resources to process them. Alliance Norse can draw on other partners for support with this.

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*In 2023/24 102 level access showers were fitted, 23 ramps, 6 ceiling hoists, 6 lift through floors, 78 stair lifts and 1 bath was adapted.
These grants changed people's lives.*

45 **WORK PROGRAMME**

It was noted that the new work programme was to be agreed in the coming weeks. Members discussed what they wished to include and suggested;

- the communications strategy, consultation and engagement framework,
- an update on local and casework data in individual Wards,
- a report from Alliance Norse updating members on the DFG programme, the Efficiency Programme
- regular milestones from the Accommodation Working Group.

RESOLVED:

That the above items be assessed against the paper analysis and agreed at the Overview and Scrutiny Programming Group.

46 **ACCESS TO SERVICES / DIGITAL / OD STRATEGY**

The Panel considered the Action Plan for the implementation of the Access to Services, Digital and Organisational Development Strategies which was accompanied by a presentation.

This covered the following:

- Our Alliance Journey
- Our Vision
- Our Goals
- Activity to date
- Our Network
- What's next

In February 2022, Cabinet approved the following new strategies:

- Access to Services Strategy
- Digital Strategy; and
- Organisational Development Strategy

The strategies were designed to respond to new challenges as the Council needed to continue its transformation, developing new ways to make services more intelligent and more relevant to the lives of the people who rely on them.

Each of the strategies contained an outline action plan which sets out the initiatives that will be undertaken over the next three years to implement the strategies. A number of the actions overlap and it was agreed that, following their approval, a combined action plan would be developed which will establish timescales and milestones for the delivery of the individual projects.

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Emerging from the combined action plan was the implementation of an Alliance wide service review programme. This had recently been mobilised and was branded as 'Alliance: Our Future'.

Members thanked officers for their presentation and expressed their support for the Strategy. Discussions were held around engagement of all staff, safety measures being in place for staff involved with ASB, planning applications, the use of digital technology and the support for people who did not use it. Members discussed the use of AI, the collection and storage of data, monitoring of projects, the frequency of feedback sessions and how quickly issues could be raised.

RESOLVED:

- 1) The Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel noted the progress of the combined action plan for delivery of the strategies as detailed at Appendix B to the report;
- 2) That the content of the presentation be noted.

47 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair moved:-

"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."

48 **QUESTION TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER - EXEMPT**

A question was received and an answer was provided in relation to Section 106 monies.

The meeting closed at 11.20 am

_____Chairman_____Date