

Community Overview & Scrutiny Panel - 5 December 2016

32 STAFFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE ANNUAL UPDATE - BRIAN MOSS, LEAD OFFICER

Brian Moss, Head of Northern Service Delivery Group, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Carl Mason, Station Manager for Leek and Biddulph, gave a presentation to the Panel which covered the following topics:-

- The service and the future;
- Community Fire Stations in the Moorlands area;
- Staffing arrangements;
- Demand and response arrangements;
- Moorlands Partnership and partnership arrangements;
- Community Room usage

Following the presentation, Members had the opportunity to give feedback and ask questions. Discussion took place around the feasibility of the ambulance service being based at Cheadle Fire Station, the importance of rural stations and recruitment into the service.

Members were pleased that Safe and Well Checks were carried out by Fire Officers but had some reservations around how this was financially managed and how officers carried out the checks when people were reluctant.

The officers explained that the service always welcomed partners to maximise the use of facilities, recruitment was ongoing and the time for newly appointed fire officers to be operational was being reduced. There were also no plans to close rural fire stations.

Approximately 30, 000 Safe and Well Checks had been carried out, most of which were at properties which had been identified as being occupied by vulnerable people, were in areas that fires had occurred or there were issues relating to crime. Generally, people were happy to have the checks carried out due to the Fire Service being trusted within the community. Through cooperative working methods, one visit to a property could be maximised and referrals to the appropriate agencies carried out. There was a cost to provide the checks however, this helped to reduce the demand on the NHS and other agencies.

The Panel found the update to be very informative and thanked the officers for attending the meeting.

DECIDED: That the presentation be received.

33 CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU - IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL TO REMOVE COUNTY COUNCIL FUNDING - SUE NICHOLS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CITIZENS ADVICE SOUTH WEST.

Sue Nicholls, Chief Executive Citizens Advice Staffordshire South West, advised the Panel that Staffordshire County Council was proposing to withdraw funding for the Debt, Benefit and Consumer Advice Service. This was a county wide service which had been funded through a variety of different agreements with SCC for 30 years.

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The CAB was concerned that the loss of this service would severely impact on already stretched local public and voluntary sector services, particularly local district councils, with people having nowhere to turn for free and confidential advice.

It was likely that residents in the Moorlands area would be displaced by the loss of service and have either no access to advice services or, much reduced access.

As a county wide service, the Debt, Benefit and Consumer service had, over the last two years;

- Supported over 55,000 Staffordshire residents
- Helped residents claim £14.7 million of additional income which directly contributes to the Staffordshire economy
- Helped residents deal with more than £11 million worth of debt

Local district/borough councils already recognised the value of the Citizens Advice service, with most districts providing direct financial support. There was a widely recognised acknowledgement of the benefits and despite the financial pressures local councils face themselves through budget cuts, they had worked closely with local services to retain advice services which are embedded within the communities across Staffordshire.

Over the last 30 years Staffordshire County Council had provided additional funding to help develop the range of advice provision including specialist debt and benefit advisers, which have been invaluable to residents, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

The financial contribution made by Staffordshire County Council to this current service was £511,000 per year and the collective contribution made by the District/Borough councils was just under £500,000. The CAB fully acknowledged the difficult financial challenge that the Staffordshire County Council faced.

Given that in the last two years the Citizens Advice service in Staffordshire as a whole, helped residents gain more than £42million in additional income, this being a substantial boost to the economy, it demonstrated the value and cost effectiveness of the service.

The impact of the loss of income from Staffordshire County Council could not only seriously impact on the advice services available across the county but it could also seriously impact on the advice sector across Staffordshire with the loss of jobs, skills and experience, loss of services, loss of volunteer opportunities and in some districts, see the closure of local Citizens Advice services.

Some local district services were already struggling to maintain their services and had said that without the financial support from the county, they would be unsustainable and have to close, potentially from April 2017. This could cause real “advice deserts” across the county and would doubly impact on district councils and the local Citizens Advice that remained open.

Citizens Advice offices across Staffordshire and their partners wanted to continue to work collaboratively with the Districts and County Council to deliver services that helped to meet both the strategic objectives and vision to be a healthy, prosperous and happy place to live, but also the direct needs of its residents.

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Members commented how invaluable the CAB Service was and felt that if branches were to close many people would be detrimentally impacted.

The Panel fully supported the CAB in retaining funding from the County Council and requested that a letter was sent to the relevant Cabinet Member in advance of the Council meeting on the 8th December 2016. A petition containing 11, 500 signatures would be presented at this meeting and the CAB had been advised that the County would review its decision.

DECIDED: That the information be received and a letter sent to the County Council.

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COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE - DAVID SMITH, PRINCIPAL OFFICER COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

David Smith, Principal Officer Communities and Partnerships and Vicky Ellis, Member and Community Support Officer, were in attendance at the meeting to provide a Community Safety update to Members.

Every district or borough in the country must have a partnership that met to look at crime and disorder issues. For the Moorlands the partnership was called the Moorlands Together Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership. The partnership was chaired by the Council's Portfolio Holder for Communities.

The partnership included organisations such as Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police, Your Moorlands, and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Other organisations which the partnership worked with included community groups, residents' associations, schools and colleges and organisations such as Arch (domestic abuse), Connected Communities (child sexual exploitation), CGL (formerly CRI – young people's substance misuse) and Sporting Communities.

Legislation required the partnership to work together to tackle:

- Crime and disorder;
- Antisocial behaviour;
- Behaviour that spoils the local environment;
- Misuse of drugs and alcohol; and
- Adult and youth reoffending.

Each year, the partnership was required to produce a community safety strategic assessment and used this to develop a number of priorities for the district. The assessment was produced by the County Council's Insight Team on behalf of the partnership.

Staffordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner provided £65,000 to support the delivery of activities against each of these priorities. In addition, individual agencies also committed their own finances, workers and resources to support delivery of partnership activity.

The priorities that were agreed by the partnership for 2016/17 were as follows:

- Adults at Risk;
- Safeguarding Children;
- Anti-social Behaviour;

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- Substance Misuse.

The Panel was also advised that the partnership oversaw the delivery of the Police and Crime Commissioner's SPACE scheme in the district which aimed to provide activities for 11-17 year olds during the summer school holiday period.

Discussion took place around graffiti, childrens' care homes and the delivery of guidance on alcohol misuse.

DECIDED: That the update be received.

35 WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel considered its Work Programme and agreed the items listed.

DECIDED: That the Panel's Work Programme for 2016/17 be agreed.

36 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – 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.

37 EXEMPT MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON THE 17TH OCTOBER 2016.

(Paragraph 3 - Financial or business affairs of any particular person).

DECIDED: That the exempt minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on the 17th October 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

At this point in the meeting, members considered the speaking arrangements when tenant representatives from Your Housing Group were in attendance at meetings of the Panel. The Panel agreed that the representatives would be able to speak at the discretion of the Chair.

The meeting closed at 4.05 pm

_____Chairman _____Date