

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

**22 September 2021**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>Councillor Sybil Ralphs - Council Leader SMDC</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Sally Hampton - Member and Community Services Officer</b>
<b>WARDS INVOLVED:</b>	<b>Non specific</b>

**Appendices Attached –**

**Appendix A** -Terms of Reference and Membership of Overview and Scrutiny Panels

**1. Reason for the Report**

1.1 To provide Councillors with a summary of the work undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels during 2020 – 2021

**2. Recommendation**

2.1 That the report be noted.

**3. Executive Summary**

3.1 During 2020/21, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels continued to scrutinise performance internally/externally, hold the Cabinet to account and contribute to policy development. The range of work and issues considered by each Panel during 2020/21 are summarised in sections 6 - 9 of the report. Appendix A of the report contains the terms of reference of each Panel and its membership.

**4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

4.1 The successful delivery of all corporate priorities is dependent upon the effective scrutiny and development of Council policies and services.

Mark Trillo  
**Executive Director (Governance & Commissioning)**

**Web Links and  
Background Papers**

[Overview & Scrutiny Panel agendas and reports](#)

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**5. Detail**

5.1 The Cabinet is responsible for making the day-to-day decisions concerning the implementation of policies of the Council. Overview and Scrutiny Panels ensure that the Cabinet is publicly held to account for their actions and seeks to promote open and transparent decision-making and democratic accountability. They also have a role in researching, scrutinising other bodies and ensuring that the Council's policy and budget framework is respected and realising the key aims of the Council's Corporate Plan. Overview and Scrutiny Panels may appoint Task and Finish Working Groups/Sub-Committees to examine any issue in more depth.

5.2 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings of the Scrutiny Panels and Working Groups have been held virtually and effective participation has continued to take place with the involvement of partners, outside organisations and individuals. A noticeable increase in the number of councillors attending such meetings and the public observing meetings has been noted. Cabinet Portfolio Holders also attend meetings to provide updates or answer questions. Further to a request from the previous year's Annual Scrutiny Report, a summary of the questions received for each Panel is detailed below.

<b>Scrutiny Panel</b>	<b>Summary of Questions</b>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding for homeless people during the Covid-19 Lockdown.</li><li>• Budget for the Rural Bus Service Initiative and other pilot projects.</li><li>• Breakdown of the costs and income related to SMDC car parks.</li></ul>
Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use of Disabled Facility Grants to promote independent living at home for those with disabilities</li><li>• Provision of outdoor activities provided by Parkwood Leisure</li><li>• The Council's Local Enforcement Plan and how this can be accessed by the public.</li><li>• If a time period of 2 years was reasonable to determine an application for an unauthorised development that was causing environmental</li></ul>

	<p>problems for neighbours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of a Council Member Permit Holder parking space on Silk Street Car Park</li> <li>• Costs of both the painting and subsequent removal the parking space</li> <li>• A full detailed register and maintenance information of all SMDC assets</li> <li>• The amount Biddulph Town Council will receive for its Artisan Market and when payment will be received.</li> <li>• If the full cost of the creation and subsequent removal of the parking space had been repaid.</li> <li>• Timescales for applicants and agents to receive a response from the Planning Department.</li> <li>• If there would be a review of the Council's Tourism Strategy, given the increase in staycations due to the pandemic.</li> <li>• Support for farmers now that Britain was no longer a member of the EU</li> <li>• Re-use of the mills given the potential impact on import taxes following the departure from Britain from the EU</li> <li>• Refurbishment of the roundabout on St John's Road in Biddulph</li> <li>• Maintenance of the Victorian lamp standard on Leek Market Place</li> <li>• Update on the management transfer of Wetley Moor Common to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust</li> <li>• Fees for the Leek Trestle Market consultation and the decision making process</li> <li>• Query around advice given to Cabinet Members</li> <li>• Operating times of Tape Street Car Park in Cheadle</li> <li>• A further update on the transfer of Wetley Moor Common to SWT</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility of District Councillors under the Equality Act 2010 to counter racism and promote diversity in their actions, statements and behaviour</li> <li>• Hate crime data between 2015 to 2019</li> <li>• SMDC's actions to reduce carbon emissions</li> <li>• Receipt of Covid grant funding for Biddulph Town Council</li> <li>• Completion of the Council's Tree Planting Strategy</li> <li>• Role of community and voluntary groups in maintaining public assets such as benches, planted areas and bus shelters</li> <li>• Progress made by the Leader in relation to the improvement of rural bus services</li> <li>• Plans for No 3, The Villas to house homeless people</li> <li>• Whether the final version of the Climate Change Action Plan will include additional information to</li> </ul>

	ensure the timely, costed, and resourced delivery of the Plan
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of additional money from Government to employ Marshalls to check on Covid -19 regulation compliance</li> <li>• SMDC assessment of the services available in Leek for those who use hearing aids</li> <li>• Support for vulnerable residents as the Council recovers following the pandemic</li> <li>• Clarification of the criteria used locally to identify adult carers to receive vaccinations</li> <li>• How the Panel delivers on fundamental principles of good scrutiny</li> </ul>

5.3 Each Overview and Scrutiny Panel is responsible for setting its own Work Programme. These are informed by the Council's Forward Plan containing Key Decisions to be made by the Council's Cabinet. The Work Programme is listed as a standing item for review and approval at each Panel meeting. Executive Directors work closely with the Chairs of each Panel to assist in the planning of agendas, provide briefings and ensure the Panel meets its objectives. Support is also provided by the Democratic Services Team together with Officers from the Council's various service areas.

## 6. Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel

6.1 To ensure that financial management is sound thorough consideration was given to regular financial, procurement and performance reports, which included performance against the budget and a review of fees and charges. Members were kept up to date with progress with regard to the Council's Efficiency Programme, revenue collection, treasury management, Capital Programme and customer feedback. Consideration was also given to a schedule of write off balances which were deemed as non-recoverable.

6.2 Members considered a Financial Recovery and Positive Legacy report which outlined the work that had commenced on the Council's recovery from COVID 19 in late April 2020, with 5 main work streams having been identified:-

1. Reinstating services (to be reported to the Service Delivery Panel);
2. Economic recovery (Service Delivery Panel);
3. Community recovery (Community Panel);
4. Financial recovery (Resources Panel);
5. Taking advantage of the positive legacy (Resources Panel).

Also due to Covid-19, the Performance Framework 2020/21 was revised. The Panel received information on the proposed amendments to the current performance targets for 2020/21, which had been made necessary because of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the Council's ability to meet its previously agreed targets.

- 6.3 Claire Hazeldene – Interim Executive Director (Finance & Customer Services), presented the 2021/22 Budget and an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 – 2024/25. The report contained a forecast of the longer term impact the Coronavirus pandemic has had on the financial position of the Authority.
- 6.4 Vanessa Higgins – Information Business Partner, presented the Annual Report 2019/20 which compared Staffordshire Moorlands’ performance and costs with councils in the West Midlands region and nationally, highlighting further action where needed. She also advised members on how the Council continued to embed good information management practices through its ASSURED framework. The Information Governance Group, chaired by Mark Trillo, promoted these good practices and oversaw the Council’s approach to good information governance.
- 6.5 Two presentations were given to members. The first was delivered by Jeff Plant, Director of Operations at EPIC Housing (**E**mpowering **P**eople, **I**nspiring **C**ommunities) giving details of the organisation’s history and purpose in relation to the Council’s Empty Housing Strategy.

The second presentation updated the Panel on the Council’s Disabled Facilities Grant, which included proposals for the expansion of the Grant offer as part of the wider review of the Council’s Housing Renewal Assistance Policy.

- 6.6 Neil Rodgers – Executive Director (Place), introduced a report to confirm that an engagement was under way with Norse Group Ltd to develop a joint venture partnership for Facilities Management Services and to provide a vehicle for securing commercial opportunities to offer such services to other public and private sector organisations in Derbyshire and Staffordshire.
- 6.7 Members scrutinised a report introduced by Andrew Stokes – Chief Executive Officer, on the revised management structure for the Alliance.
- 6.8 To ensure the business of the Council continued and for members to have the opportunity to comment on reports outside of formal committee meetings, information digests were distributed to all councillors. The Resources Panel received information digests on:-
- The Development of an Organisational Development Strategy
  - An update on the Access to Services Strategy
  - Updated Freedom of Information & Environmental Information Regulations

## **7. Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

- 7.1 The Panel scrutinised a range of subjects over the year focused on services provided by the authority. This included the annual report on the performance of Alliance Environmental Services Ltd (AES) and Parkwood Leisure.

A presentation was delivered by Kevin Melling and Jane Thomason from AES. Members requested for the organisation's environmental actions, impacts and ambitions to be included in future updates.

Francois Smit - Regional Director and Elaine Harding – General Manager Parkwood Leisure, provided a presentation and it was agreed that the next annual performance update would include the percentage of use at each of the leisure centres.

- 7.2 The Panel considered a report which identified the impact of COVID-19 on service delivery and the plans that were being put into place for recovery. Members supported the proposed recovery plans outlined within the report and identified areas of activity which required further consideration.
- 7.3 Councillor Deaville – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Sports and Robert Wilks Principal Officer (Leisure and Recreation), introduced a report on the progress of the second stage of the Council's Leisure Consultancy work. The Panel considered the information and a Leisure Facility Working Group was established to support the development of a 'Leisure Transformation Plan'.
- 7.4 Ben Haywood – Head of Development Services, attended a meeting of the Panel to introduce a report which appraised Members of:
- a. recent changes to the planning system enacted in the Business and Planning Act 2020
  - b. proposed changes to the current Planning System as set out in the Government Consultation Document Published 6 August 2020
  - c. proposed changes as set out in the White Paper "Planning for the Future" which was published for consultation by Government on 6th August 2020

Due to the level of information to be considered, Seminars were held after the meeting for all members to attend.

- 7.5 Consideration was given to a variety of regeneration items such as an update on Leek Market Hall and Cheadle Town Centre Projects. These items were debated fully and members gave feedback to the Head of Regeneration.
- 7.6 The Panel received an update report on the progress of the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Councillor Porter – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity was present to highlight the key points within the report and respond to questions from members. Councillors wished to see measurable outcomes incorporated in the report.
- 7.7 Members deliberated 3 Call-in requests of Cabinet/Portfolio Holder Decisions, in accordance with the procedure rules:-
- Leek Market Hall – The Panel decided (by a vote) not to refer back the decision to the relevant portfolio holder for reconsideration. The Portfolio Holder was asked to note or take account of concerns

- Disposal of Plot 12-15 Victoria Business Park, Biddulph – The Panel decided (by a vote) to refer back the decision to Cabinet for reconsideration
- Cheadle Town Centre Projects - The Panel decided (by a vote) to refer back the decision to Cabinet for reconsideration

7.8 The first meeting of the Car Park Working Group took place and Katy Webster – Head of Assets, gave a presentation to keep the Panel updated on its progress to date.

7.9 The Service Delivery Panel received the Physical Activity and Sports Strategy Update and the Development of a Homelessness Strategy Action Plan in the form of an information digest.

## **8. Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

8.1 Members received the annual update from the Staffordshire Commissioner and scrutinised the annual operational policing report provided by Chief Inspector Mark Thorley.

8.2 On a six monthly basis, the Panel receives a briefing paper introduced by Sharon Wheeler – Property Manager, which provides a performance and development update on Your Housing Group business areas identified in the legacy agreement. Members have the opportunity to fully scrutinise the performance of the organisation, comment and give feedback to the officers present.

8.3 The Panel debated a report which outlined possible key social challenges and issues to consider in the recovery phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.

8.4 Councillor Porter – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity, introduced a Climate Change Update report and a more recent briefing paper on the Climate Change Working Group which set out the work carried out by the Council to date. At a later meeting, the Head of Democratic and Community Services provided a verbal update on the Climate Change Action Plan. The Panel also received a Climate Change Update in the form of an Information Digest.

8.5 At the request of a Panel member, representatives from The Early Outcomes Fund Project, gave a presentation on the work carried out by organisation. The Project aimed to develop a range of strategies and initiatives that would improve children’s speech, language and communication in the Early Years.

8.6 Throughout the year, the Panel considered a range of community safety items, which included two Protection Orders. The first was a Wildfire Public Spaces Protection Order and the second was around Alcohol Exclusion Zones. Members supported the recommendation for Cabinet to approve the Orders.

8.7 David Smith – Principal Officer Communities and Partnerships, attended a meeting to introduce a Household Duty of Care report which detailed the prevention of unlawful deposit of waste within the District. The Panel

recommended Cabinet set the fixed penalty amount for failure to comply with the household duty of care at the maximum permitted level of £400.

- 8.8 The Delegated Decision – Proposal for use of Discretionary Disabled Facilities Funding for a Community Project at South Moorlands Leisure Centre was called-in by members. Following in depth scrutiny and in accordance with the procedure rules, the Panel decided not to refer back the decision to the relevant Portfolio Holder for reconsideration.

## **9. Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

- 9.1 The Panel scrutinised a range of subjects over the year, focused on items relating to the health service at the request of the Panel via the Work Programme. Members received updates from each of the representatives below and had the opportunity to ask questions:-

- Jennie Collier - Managing Director, Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust gave a detailed presentation on Covid-19 and an update on community hospitals. Directors Tracey Shewan and Mark Seaton from the Clinical Commissioning Group were also present for this item.
- Tony Bullock – Lead Commissioner, Public Health Commissioning at SCC, provided a presentation on the Drug and Alcohol Service.
- Marcus Warnes – Accountable Officer and Tracey Shewan, CCG gave an Annual Update presentation and further information around Integrated Care Hub consultation.

- 9.2 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a special meeting of the Panel was convened in April 2020, for Dr Harland to introduce a presentation detailing the Local Outbreak Control Plan. County Councillor Alan White (Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing) was also present at this meeting. Later in the year, they attended again to provide the latest comprehensive update on Covid-19 to the Panel.

- 9.3 At the meeting in December 2020, the Chair advised members that the SMDC Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel was taking the lead on scrutiny of the temporary closure of the Leek Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) only. Scrutiny on all other aspects, including anything permanent, remained under the Staffordshire County Council's Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee.

- 9.4 Neil Carr O.B.E. – Chief Executive Officer and Jennie Collier – Managing Director, were present from the Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust to respond to questions and gave assurance that Leek MIU had closed temporarily.

- 9.5 The Officers also attended the meeting of the Panel in March 2021, to provide the latest information on Leek MIU and an update on the development of the Leek Integrated Care Hub. During this meeting, the CEO confirmed the Trust was in a position to make some conditional commitments to the Panel on the re-opening of Leek MIU by the end of June 2021, when assured it can be done safely across the system and certain criteria were met.

- 9.6 At the request of this Panel, a letter was sent to Marcus Warnes, Accountable Officer for the North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and also Cllr Jeremy Pert, Chair of Staffordshire County Council's Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee, asking that the free service be re-instated in Leek for hearing loss, essential hearing aid maintenance and the provision of hearing aid batteries.
- 9.7 A letter was sent to the County Council to request that the phases for carers to receive Covid-19 vaccinations be disclosed to GP's to expediate the vaccination of all carers.
- 9.8 Finally, a letter of thanks was sent on behalf of the Panel to the vaccination stations within the Moorlands.