

# **STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING**

### **Minutes**

**WEDNESDAY, 23 MARCH 2022**

PRESENT: Councillor G Heath (Chair)

Councillors J Aberley, C J S Atkins, J Davies, M Gledhill,  
N Hawkins, T Holmes, K Hoptroff, K J Jackson, J T Jones,  
L A Malyon, T Riley, P Roberts, P Routledge and N Yates

IN ATTENDANCE: S Hampton Member and Community Services Officer  
P Trafford Member & Community Services Officer  
V Higgins Information Business Partner  
T Cooper Head of Organisational Development and  
Transformation  
K Pointon Head of Finance  
H Core Head of Housing Services  
J Betts Interim Executive Director Finance and  
Revenues & Benefits

APOLOGIES: Councillors K Flunder, B A Hughes, D Shaw and P Wilkinson

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

There were no substitute members.

52 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Cllr. K Jackson asked, further to Min. 48 (Empty Properties Levy), whether any further information had been received from Government regarding 'Levelling Up'? John Betts confirmed that no formal information had been received, but would forward any information to members as and when it came in.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting of the Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel held on 2 February 2022 be **APPROVED** as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

Cllr. Malyon noted that Cllr. Porter had posted on Social Media that he had met with a Ukrainian Minister. She asked whether the Council was to be more pro-active in helping with the difficult situation following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

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John Betts confirmed that the CEO had recently been in meetings with the UK Government regarding this and a national website had 'gone live' for expressions of interest to be made. Funding was available to local authorities and individuals who volunteered to help in homing the refugees. Checks had to be done regarding safeguarding and there would be work with other agencies (e.g. for mental illness trauma) and further details were awaited.

Cllr. Yates asked for a regular Information Digest to be issued on the subject and the Chair advised that Staffs County Council staff were also dealing with associated matters.

### 54 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:

There were no declarations of interest made.

### 55 WORK PROGRAMME

Members requested the addition of the following items to the Work Programme:-

- Cllr. Atkins - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (See item later in this agenda);
- Cllr. K Jackson - the Update Report on the Empty Property Strategy be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the panel;
- Cllr. K Jackson – Report on the financial implications of the CCTV contract;
- Cllr. Malyon – Report on the Welcome Back Fund – what was spent & where;
- Cllr. Holmes – Update report on Dementia training and equipment required.

**RESOLVED** – That, subject to the above additions, the Work Programme into 2022/2023 be **AGREED**.

### 56 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, IF ANY

There were no questions to Portfolio Holders.

### 57 PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Vanessa Higgins – Information Business Partner – introduced the report and its 3 appendices:-

1. Targeted Measures (Quarterly Updates);
2. Contextual Measures (Where it was inappropriate to set a target);
3. Priority Actions (Items remaining from the current 4 year Corporate Plan).

Queries / discussion took place around the following items (*responses in brackets where given*):-

- The target set for local procurement was 6.5%. It was vital to support local businesses. What was the current position? (*This was a tentative target, with a revised Procurement Strategy to be published shortly. Current figure to be circulated to members*);
- The figure for processing Freedom of information (FOI) requests was £34k. Was this a reasonable figure and how did this compare with other authorities, particularly High Peak BC? (*The High Peak BC figure was very similar to SMDC. Comparison with other authorities was difficult as they measured requests in different ways. Information would be compiled and issued to members. Most FOI requests were from suppliers, students etc, not members of the public*);

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- *Some parts of the report had no previous years' information for comparison. E.g. There were only 362 online 'hits' recorded for Tourist Information (this was generally where measures were relatively new and so trend information was not available);*
- *Housing Benefit processing times potentially causing hardship if extended ( The target had actually been reduced from 18 to 13 days and the Council was performing at around 8 days, which was amongst the top 20% of Councils);*
- *There was a high subsidy for Leek & Cheadle markets but not for Biddulph. This imbalance needed to be explained. There was a perception of a decline in markets. (A report would be prepared showing the current position and proposed improvements);*
- *No Councillors Community Initiative Fund information in the Framework? (This was on the Council's website, though the year 2020/21 was yet to be added).*

Members requested the formation of a Markets Working Group, to include the participation of elected members, market traders and town council representation. This was approved unanimously.

**RESOLVED** – That the Performance Framework 2022/25 be **RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL** by the Cabinet.

### 58 REVIEW OF EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty which applied to public bodies such as the council. It challenged organisations to know how age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion / belief, sex and sexual orientation described the experiences of local communities, both individually and collectively.

Organisations were expected to use this understanding to demonstrate due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty to;

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Council adopted its current Equality and Diversity Policy in 2018. It was necessary to review its Equality Objectives, which were appended to the report. These included the following actions:-

- Updating the Council's Community Profile (a resource which described the makeup of our communities by protected characteristics) and to promote its use to services for the purposes of policy development and service delivery;
- Incorporating consideration of equality impacts as part of the introduction of the report management element of the Council's committee management system;
- Improving the information held with regards to the profile of the Council's workforce (collecting information in relation to protected characteristics).

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The framework set out 4 modules for improvement, underpinned by a range of criteria and practical guidance that could help a council plan, implement and deliver real equality outcomes for employees and the community. The 4 modules were:-

- Understanding and Working with your Communities;
- Leadership and Organisational Commitment;
- Responsive Services and Customer Care;
- Diverse and Engaged Workforce.

Responding to member queries, Head of Democratic Services Linden Vernon confirmed that a Local Government Association event was aimed to encourage participation by members of minority groups. A Councillor survey was to be issued to gain a full profile of all Councillors and objectives would be embedded in the Service Plan. Information from the 2021 Census would also be used in this regard.

Cllr. Holmes advised that he was working with the Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service and enquired whether, if situations were encountered during that work, it was acceptable to report those situations back to SMDC? This was confirmed as being acceptable.

**RESOLVED** – That the revised Equality Objectives be supported for **ADOPTION** by the Cabinet.

It was noted that this was the last Resources Panel to be attended by John Betts (Interim Executive Director – Finance & Revenues) and members thanked John for his contributions whilst in post.

The meeting closed at 11.09 am

\_\_\_\_\_Chairman\_\_\_\_\_Date