

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

**21 September 2022**

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Scrutiny Annual Report</b>
<b>PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>Councillor Paul Roberts - Council Leader</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Sally Hampton - Democratic 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 2021 – 2022.
- 2. Recommendation**
  - 2.1 That the report be noted.
- 3. Executive Summary**
  - 3.1 During 2021/22, 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 2021/22 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)**

- 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 Following the expiry of the regulations for remote meetings on 7 May 2021, councillors have been required to attend meetings in person. Hybrid meetings have allowed attendees to join virtually but legislation has prevented hybrid attendees from voting. Effective participation has continued to take place with the involvement of partners, outside organisations and individuals. Cabinet Portfolio Holders also attend meetings to provide updates or answer questions. 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>• Policy on the use of bailiffs in relation to Council Tax matters</li> <li>• Proportion of privately rented housing within the District, resources to carry out powers under the Tenants Fees Act 2019 and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and plan to operate a licensing scheme for private landlords.</li> <li>• Clarification around the variable cost of the annual car parking permits.</li> </ul>
Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of street lights owned/manged by the Council which have been upgraded to LED lighting.</li> <li>• Completion of the Cheadle Car Parks to the design requested by the Car Park Working Group and project costings.</li> <li>• An update on the Cheadle to Cresswell Railway Track project</li> <li>• Re-opening of the Smithfield public toilets following the recent vandalism to ensure the regeneration of the town is not impacted.</li> <li>• The print and distribution of the Support Businesses Christmas Guide.</li> <li>• Temporary closure of the Nicholson Museum and</li> </ul>

	<p>Art Gallery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site investigation of Plots 12-14 Victoria Business Park, Biddulph</li> <li>• Proposed Car Parking Strategy for Cheadle</li> <li>• Update on progress that has been made on the transfer of Wetley Moor Common to Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.</li> <li>• Breakdown of the expenditure of Welcome Back funding.</li> <li>• Timescale and start date for works on the Trestle Market.</li> <li>• Use of the Trestle Market by the Scooter Fest Event.</li> <li>• Process followed by SMDC when it receives a request from a community organisation to use Council facilities and buildings.</li> <li>• Street cleansing of areas in Leek and Cheadle (photographs supplied)</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reason for an item on Climate Change not being included on each agenda for meetings of this Panel.</li> <li>• Provision to encourage active travel.</li> </ul> <p>Public workshops in relation to Part 2 of the Climate Change Action Plan</p>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether the mobile breast screening service at Biddulph Valley Leisure Centre would continue to operate once the lease had expired.</li> <li>• Number of health visitors and implications for looked after children and vulnerable young people with reduced numbers of health visitors.</li> <li>• When the opening hours of the Minor Injuries Unit at Leek Moorlands Hospital would return to normal hours. Reason patients arriving before 5pm were being turned away by the Reception, without any medical assessment.</li> <li>• Ambulance response times.</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. Following one of the recommendations made by the (CfGS), the Work Programme is now reviewed and approved at the beginning of each 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 report on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Review with a focus on Universal Credit implications and were updated on the current situation with regard to Ascent Housing LLP.
- 6.3 The Annual Health and Safety report was scrutinised by the Panel. A staff survey had been completed in late 2020 which showed a large proportion of staff were in favour of working from home in some form on a permanent basis. This formed part of the positive Covid legacy, with increased productivity and reduced travel which has led to the development of the Agile Working Policy.
- 6.4 Vanessa Higgins – Information Business Partner, presented the Annual Report 2020/21 which compared Staffordshire Moorlands' performance and costs with councils in the West Midlands region and nationally, highlighting further action where needed. The analysis was built around the Corporate Plan priorities and provided a small refocus of Priority Actions for the next 12 months.
- 6.5 At the request of members, John Betts – Interim Executive Director of Finance, Revenues & Benefits, presented reports clarifying the Council's use of enforcement agents, the Welcome Back Fund and external consultants.
- 6.6 Members were updated on the Council Tax Levies Policy which was to include a new charge on properties empty for at least 10 years and the circumstances where a levy may be waived. There were 60 properties which would become subject to the new levy with effect from 1 April 2022.
- 6.7 The Performance Framework 2022/25 was recommended for approval by Cabinet and the Panel also supported the adoption of the Revised Equality Objectives.
- 6.8 The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) have undertaken a review of the scrutiny arrangements at the Council and a member workshop had taken place on 29 September 2021. The Chief Executive attended a meeting of the Panel to outline the proposals and recommendations made by (CfGS). The proposals were open to member input and, once the consultation process was completed, a full report would be presented to Full Council.
- 6.9 Consideration was given to a report on access to services, digital and organisational development strategies. Since the re-opening of the Council's 3 'One-Stop-Shops' in September 2021, footfall had been very low. Staff were continuing with flexible working. Changes would be required in I.T., staff

working, Climate Change provision, Management Team and other areas. Information Digests had been issued to members over the last 2 years. Each of the 3 strategies required an Action Plan, which would be amalgamated.

- 6.10 A presentation was given to members on the Facilities Management Joint Venture.
- 6.11 Members also 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:-
- Remote Committee Meetings
  - Development of the Joint Procurement Strategy 2021-2025
  - Revision of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy
- 6.12 Members deliberated a Call-in request of a Portfolio Holder Decision in relation to the Community Orchard Scheme. The Panel decided (by a vote) not to refer the decision back to the relevant portfolio holder for reconsideration. In accordance with the procedure for consideration of Call-ins, Cabinet would be asked to note or take account of concerns as it saw fit without holding up the implementation of the decision.

## **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 performance update for Alliance Environmental Services Ltd (AES) and Parkwood Leisure delivered in the form of presentations. Kevin Melling and Jane Thomason represented AES and responded to queries from councillors and Francois Smit - Regional Director represented Parkwood Leisure.
- 7.2 The Panel considered a report on progress made towards identifying and supporting the development of outdoor sport and recreation capital projects across the District. To date members have recommended Cabinet approved an allocation of £11,500 from the outdoor sports capital budget towards projects being delivered by Waterhouses Parish Council and Kingsley Parish Council and £10,700 towards two projects in Endon and Leek Cricket Club. A Leisure Facility Working Group was established to support the development of a 'Leisure Transformation Plan' and has met on three occasions.
- 7.3 Consideration was given to a variety of regeneration items such as an update on the consultation of the Conservation Area Character Appraisals for Caverswall, Cheddleton, Stanley and Upper Tean and the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Staffordshire Moorlands. These items were debated fully and members gave feedback to the Regeneration Officers.
- 7.4 Following a further two meetings of the Car Parking Working Group, the Car Parking Strategy was scrutinised by the Panel and there were a number of concerns raised in relation to the detrimental impact it would have on the town of Cheadle.

- 7.5 Members considered a Call-in request of the Car Parking Strategy Cabinet Decision in accordance with the procedure rules and listened to a verbal statement from a member of the public in relation to the submission of the petition to oppose the charge period (8:00 am to 6:00 pm) and the increased parking tariffs in Leek. During the meeting of Full Council on 23 Feb 2022, the Leader advised that the Strategy had been altered and free parking would be available in Leek before 9:30am and after 3:30pm.

Following in depth scrutiny, the Panel decided (by a vote) not to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration and was asked to note or take account of concerns as it saw fit without holding up the implementation of the decision.

- 7.6 The Service Delivery Panel received the revised Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2021-26 for the Council following public consultation and recommended this for Cabinet approval and were updated on the proposal to transfer the management of the SMDC Countryside Sites.
- 7.7 The Panel has received Information Digests on the Community Renewal Funding and Levelling Up Fund.

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

- 8.1 Members scrutinised the annual operational policing report provided by Chief Inspector Mark Thorley who was accompanied by Moorlands Neighbourhood Policing Team Deputy Commander Inspector Jason Allport. The update incorporated an explanation of the new policing model and the Chief Inspector responded to queries from members.
- 8.2 Rob Barber introduced himself as the newly appointed Chief Fire Officer for the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service from October 2021 and highlighted the organisations key priorities to the Panel. Members had the opportunity to ask questions and comment on the level of service provided in the area.
- 8.3 On a six-monthly basis, the Panel receives a briefing paper 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.
- 8.4 Representatives from Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph Citizens Advice Bureaux attended a meeting to provide an annual update for their organisations. Members were appraised on details of volunteers, response to Covid, statistical information, financial data, case studies and feedback from clients.
- 8.5 Jill Norman - North Staffordshire Operations Manager, Support Staffordshire, provided a presentation to members which included an overview of the organisation, contact details, and the various types of support available.
- 8.6 Throughout the year, the Panel considered a range of community safety items, which included a refreshed Community Safety Strategy, the Council's

response to anti-social behaviour and also a handbook that is intended to provide relevant advice to the residents of Staffordshire Moorlands.

- 8.7 David Smith – Head of Communities and Climate Change, attended a meeting to introduce a report to the Panel about the Arts Council England’s award of a grant of up to £943,000 for a 3-year project to increase participation in arts and culture across the District. The Panel recommend Cabinet approved the financial commitments as set out within the report.
- 8.8 Members received an update on the Levels of Pollution and the Air Quality Action Plan. Alicia Patterson – Head of Environmental Health, responded to questions and noted suggestions from members.
- 8.9 The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Biodiversity, presented the Council’s 2021/22 Climate Change Plan (Part 1) ‘Towards Carbon Neutrality 2030’ to the Panel and listened to suggestions from members. Throughout the year he attended meetings to provide verbal climate change updates and introduced the Draft Climate Change Part 2 Plan. The Panel recommended Cabinet approval of the Climate Change Strategy 2021 – 2030, and agreed to receive a written report on a 6 monthly basis along with an annual Climate Change Strategy report.
- 8.10 Mark Trillo – Executive Director (People), introduced a report which contained the feedback provided by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) following completion of their recent review of the Council’s Scrutiny arrangements.

## **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:-
- Tracy Bullock – CEO, Royal Stoke Hospital, explained the current pressures on A&E.
  - Adam McKeown – Project Director, Integrated Care Delivery, gave a presentation to the Panel on hub locations, revitalisation of the Leek site, infrastructure to enable integrated care, the overarching programme and work streams.
  - Jennie Collier - Managing Director, Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust, provided the Annual Update for the Trust via a presentation.
  - Peter Axon – CEO and colleagues, North Staffordshire Combined Health Care provided an annual update on mental health services.
  - Chris Bird – Director of Partnerships, Strategy and Digital, North Staffordshire Combined Health Care, gave a presentation on the NHS approach to Climate Change.

- 9.2 At the request of members, the Panel received a presentation on Acute Hospital Discharge from Paul Bytheway – Chief Operating Officer, Royal Stoke Hospital and Jennie Collier Managing Director, Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust.
- 9.3 Josey Povey - Associate Director, North Staffordshire Community Mental Health Services; Kenny Liang - Executive Director of Nursing & Quality, North Staffordshire Combined Health Care NHS Trust and Gail Edwards - Strategic Delivery Manager, Staffordshire County Council, attended a meeting to clarify the services available and respond to queries in relation to the future of Knivden and John Hall Gardens. Members were advised that mental health services would continue to be provided and due to investment, services would be expanded. The Trust recognised the concerns of the existing Kniveden clients and were doing as much as possible to ease anxieties during the transition period.
- 9.4 The Panel debated effectiveness of integrated care following a presentation given by Kurt Moxley - Head of Transformation at the MPFT on the Integrated Care Hub in Leek.
- 9.5 Further to the SMDC Health Overview & Scrutiny Panel taking the lead on scrutiny of the temporary closure of the Leek Minor Injuries Unit (MIU), Neil Carr – Chief Executive Officer at the Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust, updated members on the re-opening of Leek Minor Injuries Unit following its temporary closure due to the pandemic.
- 9.6 The Panel was advised of the outcomes of the review of community ambulance stations and the provision of the rural service by the West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS). Members asked questions and gave feedback to Mark Docherty – Director of Clinical Commissioning and Strategic Development/Executive Nurse. Due to the level of concern around the service, the Health Panel decided that the matter should be escalated to the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the issues impacted the whole of the County.
- 9.7 Later in the year, the Vice-Chair advised the Panel of the information obtained via a freedom of information request by Biddulph Town Council which had been analysed by a former employee of the WMAS. It was agreed for this information to be sent to the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee and due to the level of concern and the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee being responsible for the scrutiny of performance of this Service, the County Council be asked to give further consideration to this matter.