

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Questions to Portfolio Holders

Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 6 September 2023

Questions received from Councillor Flunder:

Q1. “Who has made the decision to fully close the indoor market areas for 6 months, from February 2024, without any scrutiny process whatsoever and not allowing the traders or any district councillors to look at other alternative options?”

Response from Councillor M Swindlehurst, Portfolio Holder for Leisure & Tourism:

The Levelling Up Funding is a great opportunity to invest in the Leek Market Halls and to support a thriving town centre. We are developing designs and construction programme and currently no decision has been taken to close both the Trestle and Butter markets. Officers held a consultation event with the market traders of Trestle and Butter Markets in August and have scheduled one to one sessions with traders over the coming weeks to discuss the work programme and understand the impact the construction works will have on individual businesses. The market traders will be directly affected by the works and it is right and proper that they have the opportunity to share their views and be heard. Should a full closure of both markets be the preferred course of action to undertake the works most efficiently and effectively, a formal decision-making report would be prepared, setting out the rationale and justification and would be subject to the usual scrutiny processes.

Q2. “When will all district councillors be included in the Levelling Up funding consultation processes and not be excluded as they have been since the election. Also when will we, all the district councillors and business outside Leek be included in the mailing lists of UKSPF and RSPF funding opportunities and when the application periods are open?”

Response from Councillor Price, Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning:

Since the election, a detailed report was presented to the first Cabinet meeting of the new administration on 20th June 2023, confirming the award of LUF funding and outlining the current position with regards to delivery of the LUF Programme and presenting proposals for future development of the Programme. Further, the LUF Programme is an item on the agenda of the meeting this evening for discussion by members of the Panel. All decisions required in relation to the LUF Programme will be taken in accordance with the Council’s formal decision-making process which involves all elected members.

I am pleased to report that the latest round of UKSPF grant funding opportunities were launched on Friday 1st September. We launched six new grants for local businesses and communities totalling over £1.3m. This funding is intended to support our local communities to thrive and I would ask businesses and voluntary and community groups across the District to check our website and start preparing an application.

The launch was supported by a press release that was issued on Friday. In line with other recent grant funding launches, we will share the details with all District Councillors and Parish Councils via our Corporate Services Team. We will also ensure the opportunities are publicised in our regular Business Newsletter.

As of Monday 4th September, we had already received 1 application. The grants are available until 2025 or until all the funding has been allocated so I would urge businesses, community organisations, town and parish councils, cooperatives, community businesses and social enterprises to apply.

Q3. "Why were the funding success results from the events grants application process allowed to be publicly released during the Purdah period, while cabinet members couldn't even discuss the proposed additional funding for Biddulph and the planning of the Markets consultation with officers?"

Response from Councillor Gledhill, Leader:

The grant offer letters following the applications for grant funding under the UKSPF were communicated with successful applicants, following assessment by officers and the decision taken to award grants under the agreed procedures of the Board.

To clarify, the Council made no public announcements regarding the grants during the Purdah period.

Q4. Received from Councillor Pascall

"Given that perhaps the best way of addressing homelessness and rough sleeping is a housing first" approach, what plans are there to significantly increase the supply of social, affordable and specialist housing across the whole Staffordshire Moorlands?"

Response from Councillor Cawley, Portfolio Holder for Communities:

Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness through housing and support provision. It prioritises access to permanent housing with tailored, open-ended, wraparound support for the resident that emphasises choice and control. The intensive support is free from conditions, apart from the willingness to sustain a tenancy. Individuals are not required to be housing-ready before moving in to their home; rather, secure housing is a stable platform from which to address other issues.

It focuses on a specific group of people with histories of repeat homelessness, very complex needs, experience of multiple disadvantages and for whom other services have not been successful in ending their homelessness. Evidence shows that the model helps these people housed and helps them to make improvements in their health, wellbeing and social and economic integration.

Formal housing first models do tend to work where there are larger volumes of rough sleepers, at the last count of rough sleepers in June we had 0 with 2 identified in July and 1 in August.

We have however worked with Framework in partnership to deliver 3 rough sleeper accommodation programme bedspaces with a further unit due to complete and be ready to let by October. These units include support and are a steppingstone from rough sleeping into independent accommodation.

We will continue to monitor both rough sleeping figures and referrals into RSAP accommodation and should we identify an unmet need going forwards we will of course take the necessary steps.

New affordable homes are traditionally delivered through Registered Providers (housing associations) and are either funded through Homes England Affordable Homes Programme funding or through the planning system (s106 agreements). Officers continue to work with RP's and developers to secure and bring forward new affordable homes on viable sites.

We are keen to explore the role the council could play to increase the number of homes delivered. Possible delivery options which have been utilised by other Local Authorities have included using of council assets, disposing of surplus land including car parks and purchasing units with commuted sums. We will work with officers to explore these options further.