

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

6 December 2023

Council Questions

1.Question to the Portfolio Holder for Services received from Councillor Ward

“In light of the ongoing and deepening cost of living crisis being endured by the residents of the Staffordshire Moorlands, could the portfolio holder please update the council on what further measures have been added to the broad suite of interventions previously introduced by the former Conservative administration?”

Response:

“A Cabinet Delegated report was issued last week which details the progress that has been made with the actions agreed by Cabinet in October 2022

<https://democracy.highpeak.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=301&MId=2966&Ver=4>

You will be aware that in the new Corporate Plan agreed by the Council at its October meeting, there is a commitment to the development of an ongoing Cost of Living Response Plan that recognises the deepening cost of living crisis. The delegated report details this plan.

It has been previously recognised and acknowledged that the ability of the Council to provide direct financial support, over and above that distributed by government direction, to individuals is limited. There are however several initiatives where the Council is continuing to provide residents with access to financial support. These include the following new interventions agreed by the new Cabinet:

- Awarding the remaining balance of the Council Tax Support Fund to individuals who have made a new claim for Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) and other such vulnerable households throughout the 2023/24 financial year;
- Contacting vulnerable Local Council Tax Support claimants and encouraging them to make a claim

Other actions that have been agreed and implemented by the Cabinet since the election include:

- The review of the use of enforcement agents for the collection of debt
- The signing of the CAB Council Tax protocol – as a result the Council's appointed Enforcement Agents and advice agencies will work together going forward to help and support taxpayers pay their council tax bills while accessing debt advice when needed
- The involvement with the North Staffordshire Financial Inclusion Group to investigate alternative, perhaps multi-faceted, approaches to support.
- Extending the use of its earmarked reserve to develop a Staffordshire Moorlands Community Fund to provide match funding to community groups of

all forms that are providing vital support for those who are most affected by the cost-of-living crisis – the principles and eligibility criteria are set out in the Cabinet Delegated Report

- The development of proposals for the Staffordshire Moorlands UK Shared Prosperity Funding allocation for measures to reduce the cost of living through improving energy efficiency, and combating fuel poverty and climate change

A number of the Council's ongoing actions involve the signposting of individuals to other organisations for financial support. Recognising this, alongside the implementation of the Plan I intend to engage directly with these organisations with a view to increasing referrals and take-up of support."

2.Question to the Portfolio Holder for Services received from Councillor Roberts

"Could I ask the Portfolio Holder for Assets when is the reception going to be open to its full capacity with the call centre being moved to the reception area as was requested under the previous administration?"

Response:

"The reconfiguration of the reception area and call centre was costed and was prohibitive so will be considered in the light of the updated asset management strategy. However, the reception area is now open to full capacity, and we are monitoring the footfall to assess its impact."

3.Question to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism received from Councillor Flunder

"Can the markets Portfolio Holder look into the option of allowing the market traders in the Butter Market and possibly the market traders in the Trestle Market access to the shop / business unit at No1 Market Square to run their stalls on a smaller scale, during the planned development and closure of both the market trading areas. Thus some of the market traders will therefore be able to continue to trade from a location just down the road from where they are currently trading during the planned closure of the markets from late Spring 2024?"

Response:

"Officers are in detailed negotiations with a potential new tenant for No 1 Market Place, and a formal report to the Portfolio Holder to approve the granting of a new lease to them will be presented in due course if Heads of Terms are agreed, so the proposal outlined in the Question is not possible. However, as part of our discussions with the traders in advance of the planned works to the markets next year, we have considered with them the options which are available to allow them to continue trading when the works are taking place. In particular, traders have been offered alternative trading arrangements from the Council's gazebos on a Wednesday and Saturday, with the charges for stalls agreed to be at the regular

outdoor trader rate with the flexibility of a casual trading agreement. This gives the traders the flexibility of not having to pay for a stall on days that trading would not be suitable for the goods they sell.

Further, the Council is making accommodation freely available from its asset stock for traders taking up an outdoor trading option to provide secure storage for their goods, close to the market trading area for ease of transport. There will also be an increased marketing campaign for the markets, in the lead up to the refurbishment and during their closure, to ensure that shoppers are aware of their temporary relocation in the outdoor stalls.

I will shortly be presenting a report detailing the conclusion of our discussions with the traders both as to the matters outlined above and in relation to the agreed approach to compensation for any disruption which is the inevitable result of the plans to refurbish the markets next year.”

4. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Assets received from Councillor Porter

“Why haven’t the Labour Administration delivered on LED lighting across District Council buildings and the most forward looking and ambitious programme of EV charging points installations across Staffordshire, despite the previous Conservative Administration putting in place strategies to implement them?”

Response:

“The Council is fully committed to the delivery of LED lighting on its estate as set out in its Climate Action Plan and the newly adopted Asset Management Framework with the aim of achieving both a reduction in costs to the Council together with a significant reduction in its CO2 footprint.

The Conservative administration did not deliver on their EV charging policy which has allowed the new Labour administration to review and engage with the most comprehensive, cost-effective, and technically supported way forward, without delay, building on the government’s new funding programme named the Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI).

The fund, announced in March 2023 to support local authorities in England to plan and deliver charging infrastructure for residents without off-street parking has allowed Staffordshire County Council in partnership with all the Staffordshire Districts, and fully supported by Staffordshire Moorlands, to work up a joint application and in September 2023 were awarded £5m.

The Councils are working alongside Midlands Connect in complying with the funding applications processes and are currently working closely with the County LEVI delivery officer and confirming the proposed locations for EV charge point infrastructure in the district ensuring that Staffordshire Moorlands residents’ will have the comprehensive EV charging infrastructure required to fully support the transition to electric vehicles.

The fund comprises capital funding to support ChargePoint delivery and capability funding to ensure that local authorities have the staff and capability to plan and deliver charging infrastructure.”

5. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism received from Councillor Deaville

"I warmly welcome the ongoing transformation plans for Brough Park and Biddulph Leisure Centre. Would the Cabinet Member agree that improvements to South Moorlands Leisure Centre are equally important? The previous administration had ambitious and solid plans to refurbish and improve Cheadle Leisure Centre. May I please have a further update on your plans for refurbishment at Cheadle Leisure Centre with timelines please for the project?"

Response:

“I completely agree with Cllr Deaville that improving South Moorlands Leisure Centre is an important part of the Council’s Leisure Transformation Plan, as I have reiterated in my report to the last meeting of the Cabinet last week. In the absence of the level of external funding required to deliver a new build option, as had been proposed in the Council’s unsuccessful LUF bid, officers have been working with our appointed professional team to consider what alternative refurbishment options exist for the facility.

My Cabinet report outlined the options considered by the external professionals and, in light of the significant cost of these, commits to the carrying out of further and more detailed work to assess the financial viability of the options, taking into account the existing condition survey liabilities at the Leisure Centre and the potential increase in revenue that the improved facilities would generate. The outcome of this detailed work will be included within the Leisure Transformation Plan final business case which will be presented to Cabinet as soon as possible after the necessary viability assessment has been completed.”