

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel

26 June 2004

TITLE:	Annual Scrutiny Report
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Mike Gledhill - Leader
CONTACT OFFICER:	Sally Hampton – Senior Democratic Services Officer
WARDS INVOLVED:	Wards

Appendices Attached – None

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 and Committees during 2023/24.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report be noted and for members to provide feedback to the Democratic Services Team.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 During 2023/24, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels and newly established Committees 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 and Committee during 2023/24 are summarised in sections 6 - 11 of the report.

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 & Regulatory Services)

**Web Links and
Background Papers**

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

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5. Detail

- 5.1 Following a review of the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements conducted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), Council considered a report and approved a number of actions in response to the CfGS recommendations.
- 5.2 The actions included the establishment of the Overview & Scrutiny Programming Group with the initial task of making recommendations to take forward the outcomes from the CfGS review to further improve and strengthen the Council's arrangements for scrutiny.
- 5.3 The Group met on a number of occasions and developed recommendations for Council. These initial recommendations were considered and agreed by the Council at its meeting on 22nd February 2023. This included a new structure of panels and committees and the appointments of the Chairs and Vice Chairs were made at the Annual Council Meeting on 17th May 2023.
- 5.4 In response to the recommendations from the Peer Challenge, the Council also gave a commitment to take forward the findings from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. These commitments included:
- Greater focus on strategy and policy.
 - Earlier access to, and involvement with, core policy and decision-making activities.
 - Increased work programming across scrutiny and on a basis that is more elected member-led.
- 5.5 In order to ensure that there is effective work programme prioritisation it has been agreed that the following process is put in place:
- An all-member workshop to agree topics for scrutiny work programmes is organised to take place each year following Annual Council;
 - Selection criteria for items to be prioritised is based on the "PAPER Analysis" model. The tool is to be used to prioritise topics for consideration at the panel and committee meetings and to ensure that the items suggested are in line with the priorities for the Council ; and
 - The Programming Group monitors activity against the work programme and considers the appropriateness of changes as necessary.
- 5.6 The Cabinet is responsible for making the day-to-day decisions concerning the implementation of policies of the Council. Overview and Scrutiny Panels and Committees 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.

- 5.7 The majority of meetings have been held in person and hybrid meetings have allowed attendees to join virtually. 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.
- 5.8 Executive Directors and Heads of Service work closely with the Chairs of each Panel/Committee to assist in the planning of agendas, provide briefings and ensure the Panel/Committee 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 At the first meeting following the election in May 2023, the Panel received a bite-size briefing from the Executive Director (Finance and Customer Services) & Chief Finance Officer/S151 Officer and the Head of Democratic Services.
- 6.2 Throughout the year members were kept up to date with progress with regard to the Council's Efficiency Programme and the development of the workforce. Reports detailed trade union liaison and other key areas such as training, statistics regarding progression, senior leadership and procedures and opportunities in place for continued workforce development. A new Annual Employee Survey was introduced for the Alliance workforce in 2023 and members were appraised of the results and action plan.
- 6.3 Members considered a report which detailed the draft SMDC Asset Management Framework and an Accommodation Review Working Group was established. The initial meeting of the working group took place on 5 March 2024, which included a tour of Moorlands House and the next meeting is scheduled for early summertime. Site visits to other local authorities are also planned as part of the Group's research.
- 6.4 The Annual Health and Safety report updated members on the key aspects of health and safety activity which occurred across the two Councils during the period from April 2022 to March 2023.
- 6.5 The Operations Director at Alliance Norse presented the annual review of performance for the organisation and members had the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback.
- 6.6 Consideration was given to a report concerning council tax premiums for empty homes and second homes. The Panel endorsed the implementation of the premium of 100% for properties that have been empty for over one year.

7. Finance & Performance Committee

- 7.1 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.

Consideration was also given to schedules of write off balances which were deemed as non-recoverable.

- 7.2 At the request of the Committee, the Lead Procurement Officer provided an overview of the Procurement service. Members were encouraged to make suggestions that could influence changes to the Council's procurement rules. Particular reference was made to the use of the local suppliers and therefore, at a subsequent meeting, the Committee considered a briefing paper that set out details of local supplier engagement.
- 7.3 Members debated the effective scrutiny of performance. It was requested that in future, Service Heads be invited to attend meetings of the Committee on a rotational basis to provide more detailed information relating to performance in their area, such as what is underpinning performance and challenges to achieving targets. Following this, the Head of Communities and Climate Change attended a meeting with a service update and provided detailed information on CCTV.
- 7.4 A short survey has been sent to councillors to establish if the Committee has the information to fulfil its scrutiny role and if any changes are required. The survey provides opportunity for committee members to feedback opinions and is designed to inform the programme of work for the coming year.

8. Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- 8.1 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. As part of the scrutiny of these items, senior officers representing the organisations responded to questions and noted comments and suggestions made by members.
- 8.2 Members welcomed a comprehensive report in relation to the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2027, and recommended adoption of the strategy following consultation.
- 8.3 The Panel considered proposals for the future operations model for the Council's Leisure Centres and agreed to convene a joint working group with High Peak Borough Council to review the proposals in detail. The Group has met on a number of occasions, work is ongoing and a site visit to South Moorlands Leisure Centre has taken place.
- 8.4 The Panel received a presentation on the regeneration of Leek town centre following the successful award of Levelling Up funds. In conclusion, members were supportive of the plans and felt this was a wonderful opportunity to regenerate the town centre for future generations. At the meeting in March 2024, a further detailed presentation was provided on the progress made to the programme since September 2023. The Panel would continue to receive regular updates throughout the year.

- 8.5 Consideration was given to the work undertaken by the Environmental Health service in response to concerns about damp and mould in properties within the private rented sector. The Panel recommended that additional wording be added to the leaflet issued to tenants experiencing this problem.
- 8.6 The Panel was informed of the progress made to develop a new Green Spaces Strategy for the Council. Members gave feedback and suggestions on the draft policy and would be updated on the progress of the Strategy at a future meeting.
- 8.7 In January 2024, the Panel was provided with a progress update on the implementation of the Tourism Strategy and action plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands. It also provided detail on UK Shared Prosperity Fund activity to support tourism and background on the Local Visitor Economy Partnership work with Enjoy Staffordshire and Visit Peak District, Derbyshire and Derby. The Panel would continue to be updated on this strategy at future meetings.

9. Growth and Economy Committee

- 9.1 The Committee focussed its work on regeneration issues facing the District and input towards the developing Growth Strategy. At its first meeting members received a presentation on UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). Throughout the meeting members were actively involved with the debate and had the opportunity look into various topics in detail.
- 9.2 Members scrutinised a Housing Delivery Update report which included a progress review of Local Plan allocations and options for increasing the delivery of affordable housing. A presentation accompanied the report and members had the opportunity to examine issues in depth relating to the delivery of housing in the District. At a subsequent meeting, the Head of Regeneration provided a Housing Delivery update setting out background information, policy context, affordable housing delivery challenges, case studies, governance consideration. financial implications / risks and the next steps.
- 9.3 An interactive presentation on the Growth Strategy was received by the Committee at its meeting in January 2024. Members were asked to consider what themes should be included or considered as part of a Growth Strategy and information was provided around what is a growth strategy, facts and actions to support thriving businesses, people and places together with key priorities for the Growth Strategy. During the same meeting consideration was also given to a 'Spotlight on Local Economy' presentation which gave insight into the District's economy, employment, salaries, productivity and skills.
- 9.4 At the request of the Committee, a presentation of the Preparation of the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) was provided to the members. This set out the vision and implementation of the LTP which members were keen to be involved with at an early stage in the process to ensure the needs of the Moorlands were taken into account. In response to this, a meeting has taken place with the Assistant Director for Connectivity and Sustainability from Staffordshire County Council.

10. Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- 10.1 Members scrutinised the annual operational policing report provided by the Deputy Commander for the Moorlands . The update incorporated data on crime, outcomes, anti-social behaviour, road traffic collisions and staff resources. The Deputy Commander responded to queries from members.
- 10.2 A Station Manager for the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service attended the meeting in March to provide the annual update for the organisation. Members had the opportunity to ask questions and comment on the level of service provided in the area.
- 10.3 On a six-monthly basis, the Panel receives a briefing paper which provides a performance and development update on Your Housing Group (YHG) 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. In addition to this, YHG have arranged member briefings on specific topics which members have found to be very useful and have been well attended.
- 10.4 The Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Environment, presented the Annual Climate Change Report 2023. The report detailed progress towards delivering the Council's Climate Change plan and the key activities were explained to the Panel. Consideration was also given to a report on the Plan for Nature which was accompanied by a presentation given by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. The Panel recommended the Plan for adoption and the introduction of appropriate governance, monitoring and reporting arrangements. A Climate Change Working Group has been formed which meets regularly throughout the year.
- 10.5 Representatives from the Citizens Advice Bureaux attended a meeting in September 2023 to provide an annual update for their organisation. Members were appraised on details of volunteers, statistical information, financial data, case studies, access to services and feedback from clients.
- 10.6 A draft Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy and an associated Action Plan for the District was presented to the Panel which was recommended for approval together with the establishment of a Cultural Strategy Steering Group to advise on the development of a Cultural Strategy and Cultural Action Plan
- 10.7 Following work undertaken by the Defibrillator Working Group, the Panel gave feedback to the Portfolio Holder on the proposal for the Council to enter into a contract with AEDdonate to manage Community Public Access Defibrillators across the District. Members supported the Cabinet Delegated Decision to enter into a contract to manage Community Public Access Defibrillators across the district at an annual cost of up to £23,000 for the next two years to allow other funding approaches and options to be further considered.
- 10.8 The Panel considered a presentation setting out details of an enhanced Community Leadership Scheme at its meeting in November, which is a

committed priority action in the Council's new Corporate Plan. The Scheme would support councillors by identifying community issues or concerns and addressing those concerns through influencing service delivery and/or facilitating community self-help. As part of the development of the scheme, members were asked to contribute their ideas and suggestions.

- 10.9 In January 2024, the Staffordshire Commissioner attended a meeting to provide the Police, Fire and Crime Annual update which included statistical information, response times, success of the new policing model, crime prevention and commitment to the community safety partnership. The Commissioner responded to questions and received feedback from members.
- 10.10 The Head of Operations North Staffordshire for Support Staffordshire provided an update and presentation on behalf of the organisation.
- 10.11 The Panel was kept informed of the Council's safeguarding arrangements as a report was debated at the meeting in March. Members highlighted the need for Safeguarding training which has since taken place.

11. Health and Wellbeing Committee

- 11.1 The Committee scrutinised a range of subjects over the year, focused on matters relating to the health and wellbeing of the residents of the Staffordshire Moorlands, taking into account the Code of Joint Working with the County Council.
- 11.2 The Chair of the Committee provides regular updates to members on the work carried out by the Staffordshire County Council's Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As part of this update, the Committee is kept informed of the scrutiny of the performance of the West Midland Ambulance Service.
- 11.3 The Committee received a presentation on the Move More Strategy which included an introductory video and detailed information on collaboration with partners and communities, the benefits of being active, long-term health conditions data for the area, weight management and an implementation workshop.
- 11.4 At the meeting in December, the Strategic Delivery Manager, SCC and Head of Development, Together Active, provided the Committee with a presentation on Better Health Staffordshire. The presentation included an overview of Better Health Staffordshire and its mission, key headlines, whole system approach to local causes of excess weight and inactivity, causal mapping, focus for the Moorlands, food/ nutrition and contact information. The Committee will receive another update in the next municipal year. After considering this presentation, members requested Epidemiology training which was facilitated by the County Council and took place on 2 February 2024. A further session is planned to take place later on in the year.
- 11.5 The Head of Revenues and Benefits and the Head of Communities and Climate Change attended the meeting in March to inform members of the

multi-agency response to the cost of living crisis, the role of SMDC to signpost residents on where to go and how to access services. Members also received information relating to an event between agencies at SMDC on Friday 15th March 2024.

- 11.6 During the meeting in March, members received a presentation from Officers covering the topic of damp, mould and condensation. The Committee was also kept informed of the Health Inequalities Funding Application.