

# **STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**26 February 2025**

## **Council Questions**

### **1. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Communities received from Cllr L. Swindlehurst and Cllr Parkes**

“Data for Staffordshire related to mental wellbeing, particularly in children and young people, paints a bleak, worsening picture. If our communities are to thrive, develop and be transformative, we must develop a relationship with our communities that normalises the mental health narrative, works in partnership with others to ensure access to support and care, and supports social connectivity and a healthy environment.

Our Corporate Plan Aim 1, relates to the provision of a safe and healthy environment. Cognisant of that aim we have an exceptional Move More strategy, 2023-33, that recognises the impact of collaborative working and the social benefit of equality, empathy, effort and resourcefulness as an investment (page4). The influence of cultural norms, policy, the psychical and social environment, recognised as having an effect on individuals and communities. Having a Council led, mental wellbeing community strategy would make our District stand out as one concerned not only with physical health, but mental health and wellbeing inherent in our Corporate Plan, Aim 1.”

### **Response:**

“In response to the formal question raised by Cllr L Swindlehurst and Cllr A Parkes regarding the development of a Council Mental Wellbeing Community Strategy. It is recognised that positive mental wellbeing in the Council’s workforce and wider community is incredibly important and that the work of the County Council under their statutory responsibilities addresses the needs and enables effective plans to prevent and support the District’s community. The County Council’s ‘Good Mental Health in Staffordshire 2023-2028’ is one of the priorities of the Staffordshire’s Health and Well-being Strategy, the Strategy helps to achieve the County Council’s ambition to ‘build strong and resilient communities and individuals who are in control of their own physical and mental well-being’. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Move More strategy focus is to promote movement and activity to benefit overall health and wellbeing and in turn includes the benefits which movement and activity can have on mental health, Staffordshire County Council are a partner of our Move More work and delivery initiatives.

In July 2024, the Council’s Health and Wellbeing committee received a presentation from North Staffordshire Combined Health Care NHS Trust advising of the services provided within the area which include, preventative to acute support, Mental Health support teams in schools and Voluntary Community Services, the detail of the presentation was discussed and addressed how residents could access mental services, it was advised that as the services were always evolving, the Wellbeing

Portal was the most suitable place to signpost residents. The committee may be a suitable next step in considering the request and evaluate the need for a Staffordshire Moorlands Mental Wellbeing Community Strategy against strategies already in place and how this would link into wider Council services. Leisure Services will continue to work with County and various partners, which include mental health organisations, such as Rethink at John Hall Wellness Garden for example and encourage signposting to partner organisations (NHS Staffordshire and Stoke ICB) and importantly to access support and advice through Staffordshire County Council [Mental health and wellbeing - Staffordshire County Council](#).

The forthcoming review of our Local Plan also provides the opportunity to pursue the creation of mental health friendly environments through adopting appropriate policies with the goal of ensuring that the Staffordshire Moorlands becomes a mental health friendly district.”

## **2. Question to the Leader of the Council received from Cllr Taylor**

“Following the recent news that both the Nat West and Halifax plan to close their bank branches in Leek, and given also the architectural value of both buildings, what is the council doing to prevent or mitigate the impact on local residents and businesses?”

### **Response:**

“Following the announcements of the intention to close the Leek branch of the NatWest bank (closure date: 16 June 2025) and the Leek branch of the Halifax Building Society (Closure date: 4 June 2025), I have held meetings with a local residents group, NatWest and Leek Post Office. A meeting with Halifax is also planned for 7 March. I have also held talks with Dame Karen Bradley MP to co-ordinate a joint response to this significant development affecting businesses and residents in the area.

NatWest have stated that their closure is part of a national programme, reflecting the prevailing use of telephone and internet banking and the fact that footfall in branches has not recovered to pre- covid levels. Footfall is down by an average of 50% and in the case of Leek, the daily average of customers coming into the branch is around 50. NatWest believes that this makes staffing of the bank uneconomic. NatWest has made clear that the ATM service for cash will be withdrawn on closure.

On behalf of the residents’ group, I have raised the issues for people with vulnerabilities, those who simply cannot use or do not wish to use telephone or internet for their banking needs, and local, especially small, businesses who are more cash dependent. The issue of loss of cash machines on the high street is also a concern.

NatWest has responded by committing to mitigating the situation in these ways: Establishing a specialist team to assist before closure and for a period after closure,

creating a register of vulnerable customers who will have a dedicated phone line for contact, holding a community event on 19 March at the bank and being willing to go out to talk to community groups on request (churches, villages etc.).

Leek Post Office is very committed to doing everything possible to help and confirms that the post office can handle 95% of all banking needs of residents. For businesses, it is fully equipped to handle cash deposits and business needs for bags of coins and more where there is need.

In the longer term, there is a case to be pursued for Leek to have a banking hub similar to the one already working successfully in Cheadle. However, this process, run by the national not for profit organisation LINK can only be completed when a town has no bank in its location. Leek currently still has the Co-operative Bank on Derby Street. Our MP and I are pursuing this now with LINK as the future of banking in the town may well be uncertain.

In terms of the building which is a valuable, listed and architecturally prominent asset in the town centre, the intention of NatWest as the owner is to put it on the market in the near future. SMDC has asked to be kept informed on any developments. There are many possibilities for its future use.

The same issues will be explored with the Halifax Building Society and members will be kept informed of developments.”

### **3. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Environment received from Cllr Deaville**

“How many successful enforcement actions against fly-tipping offences have we made over the past year?”

#### **Response:**

“Fly-tipping is an appalling crime and can be hazardous to humans and wildlife, block roads, look unsightly and be costly to remove. It ranges from bags of garden waste thrown into a back alley, to builders’ waste left in a lay-by to commercial-scale dumping by organised crime gangs.

Under the National Fly-tipping Protocol, the Environment Agency takes responsibility for large scale illegally dumped waste; potentially hazardous waste such as that in drums or containers, or fibrous asbestos; and dumping that may be linked to criminal business activity or organised crime. The District Council takes the lead on other types of fly-tipping.

The Council takes a three-pronged approach: education, clearance and enforcement. The latter two approaches depend upon the location and nature of the illegally dumped material and the availability of any evidence that points to a culprit.

All fly-tipping incidents are investigated by either an AES or Council officer. Where appropriate, the Council will use a range of enforcement tools from verbal and

written warnings through to issuing fines and ultimately prosecuting some offenders. Smaller scale deposits may be dealt with under littering legislation.

For the 12 months from January 2024 to Jan 2025, the Council issued 49 fixed penalty notices across all types of environmental crime. This included three specifically for fly-tipping offences. In addition, the Council issued 6 warning letters and visited nine businesses relating to concerns about their waste disposal processes. There are currently five fly-tips under investigation. We cannot determine what action may follow from these until we complete our enquiries.”