

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes

WEDNESDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillor T Holmes (Chair)

Councillors J Aberley, G Bentley, G Bond, M Bowen, C Brady, B Cawley, S Coleman, M Deaville, S Ellis, B Emery, E Fallows, K Flunder, M Gledhill, A Hart, N Hawkins, G Heath, I Herdman, K Hoptroff, B A Hughes, A Hulme, K J Jackson, B Johnson, J Jones, L A Malyon, L Page, I Plant, J Porter, D Price, J Redfern, T Riley, P Roberts, P Routledge, S Scalise, L Swindlehurst, P Taylor, E Wain, R Ward, P Wilkinson, M Worthington and N Yates

APOLOGIES: Councillors C Atkins, J Davies, H Plimley, T Hall, P Jackson, L Lea, K Mills, T McNicol, S E Ralphs MBE, J Salt, D Shaw and P Wood

MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Council observed a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor Eleanor Meredith.

Prayers were offered by Reverend Nigel Irons.

39 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 12 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations were made:-

Agenda Item	Members Declaring Interest	Nature of Interest
General - Matters relating to Licensing	Cllr. Deaville	Other Interest – Current Licensee

41 **CHAIRMAN'S OR LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE, IF ANY.**

The Chairman thanked members for attending his recent Carol Service at St Edwards Church, Leek.

42 **TO CONSIDER AND DEBATE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET, OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS AND COMMITTEES, IF ANY.**

42a **LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE - TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENSING POLICY REVIEW - RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

RESOLVED:

That the changes to the current Policy be approved subject to the following amendment with regards to the requirement for licensed vehicles to comply with the emission requirements:

- At renewal – From 01/04/2024-2025 vehicle licences will not be renewed in respect of any licensed vehicle that does not meet or exceed Euro 6 emissions standards (Diesel) Euro 4 (Petrol) emissions standards.

42b **STANDARDS COMMITTEE - REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

RESOLVED:

That the revised Code of Conduct be adopted.

43 **NOTICES OF MOTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE NO. 8, IF ANY.**

43a **ACTIVITIES OF STREET PREACHERS**

Councillor B. Cawley

NM: “The Council notes the widespread dismay caused to residents of Leek by the activities of the street preachers.

It agrees that there is no place for the utterance in public spaces of homophobic or misogynistic comments which residents have been subject to for some time.

The motion believes that residents are proud to live in a diverse and tolerant society. Hateful comments have no place in our community.

SMDC will work with the police and other community safety partners, Staffordshire County Council and town and parish councils to challenge and prevent such behaviour.

SMDC wishes to assure all its residents and visitors that they are valued members of the community.”

Having been **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED**, upon being put to the vote, the **MOTION** was **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**.

1. Question to the Leader of the Council received from Councillor John Jones:

“Why are hybrid meetings no longer being allowed?”

Response:

The Leader of the Council explained that meetings were taking place in person to allow full debate and ensure that all members have the opportunity to vote on formal decisions. A hybrid approach for meetings would be used when appropriate.

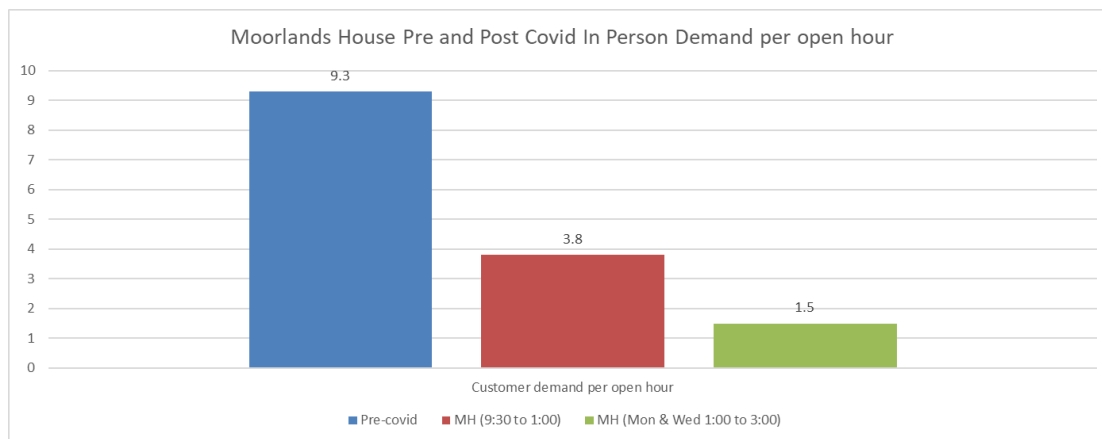
2. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Customer Services received from Cllr Linda Malyon:

“When will the Council fully open the one stop shops so the public can access services and advice?”

Response:

“The public can access advice and services through many different means and locations including Biddulph Town Hall, Cheadle Library and Moorlands house as well as on the website, and via the telephone. As we have indicated to all councillors previously, from this week we are going to be opening Moorlands house until 3pm every day by re-allocating resources from the customer services team to the front of house operation. This will bring the hours the reception is open to 27½ (compared to 37½ hours pre-covid). As we have indicated in the email that has gone out, the trade-off for this is that people may experience slightly longer wait times on the phone as we’ve had to move staff out of that department. With regards to the one stop shops, we are assessing the demand at each location. We understand that some people have been visiting the one stop shops where they couldn’t access services face to face in Moorlands house, so the demand for this may vary slightly with the extension of those opening hours.

The customer services department is short of around 5 members of staff to be able to operate at full capacity, and this has been an ongoing problem since the pandemic where the labour market locally has not allowed us to fill those vacancies as quickly as we would like, a problem that is encountered by nearly every business in the Staffordshire Moorlands and beyond. Post-pandemic, it is taking some time to quantify the level of demand for any change and to set the correct level of resource back to one of seeing people and helping them face to face vs the virtual environment that lasted far too long. The opportunity to engage with the Council now over a wider variety of channels, however, does mean that all enquiries are being dealt with fully, and an outcome of the change to our lives through covid is that the populace has adapted to its engagement with the Council in the way we have all adapted to all manner of opportunities e-commerce presents. As an example, the pre-covid level of in-person enquiries being dealt with was c.350/week (9.3/hour). Since extending the opening the Moorlands House opening hours at the beginning of October 2022, there were an average of 66 in person enquires during the 9:30am to 1:00pm period (3.8/hour) and 6 during the extra opening (to 3:00pm) on Monday and Wednesday (1.5/hour), a new demand of c.20% of the pre-covid levels.



The customer services team is the most 'in the office' team in the council by nature of the work, it is also the one that is most directly affected by small numbers of vacancies as it relies on the people to be available and ready to deal with enquiries, whether this is at Leek, or the one stop shops. This was picked up as an issue in May that had been plaguing the department for some while and, since then, I requested that the team re-double their efforts to find people to fill the vacancies which includes attending job fairs, Leek show, increased advertising of the vacancies, expansion of the apprenticeship program and we are now starting to see signs that this tide is turning and have been able to fill some vacancies more recently which have helped with us with being able to find the staff to re-deploy to get the Moorlands house reception open longer.

The one stop shop funding and budget is not sufficient for full time operation and, due to the problems highlighted above, we are unable to re-deploy any other staff from the team as we don't have the spare capacity to be able to staff all of it. If this is something that the Council wishes to operate going forwards as a fully staffed service to that extent, then I'd be more than happy to discuss the overall budget and I'm sure the portfolio holder for Finance would like to be involved in order that we can establish what the budget priorities are and, if we agree as a council that having the one stop reception areas open on a more full time basis, then we have no objection in principle to that happening.

Even if we do increase the budget however, we will still be faced with the recruitment situation that we are seeing everywhere which may make that difficult to achieve in the immediate term. If any councillors would like to suggest any alternative things we can do to quickly get the staff we would need, even on a temporary basis, we would be more than happy to work together and listen to the ideas."

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder explained that more staff had recently been recruited that would enable further extending opening hours and that hours for Biddulph and Cheadle would also be considered.

3. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Tourism received from Councillor Connor Brady:

"According to a ThinkBroadband report on broadband coverage and speeds for UK constituencies in Q1 of 2022, the Staffordshire Moorlands ranks 609 out of 650 for the percentage of premises covered by superfast broadband (30mbps) at 90.4%. This ranks below all other Staffordshire constituencies including Cannock Chase, Stafford, and Stoke constituencies.

What action is the District Council taking, with the County Council, in order to give every house in our towns and villages high speed broadband?"

Response:

"Staffordshire Moorlands Councillors and Officers work with Staffordshire County Council to champion our rural areas.

Staffordshire County Council have responsibility for delivering Digital Infrastructure through Gigafaststaffordshire: www.gigafaststaffordshire.co.uk

<https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk/> we signpost business and community enquiries to this service and raise awareness through the Business Newsletter when new opportunities arise.

We also signpost business enquiries to Staffordshire Digital Innovation Partnership who work with sme`s to improve their digital profile.

<https://www.staffs.ac.uk/business-services/funding/staffordshire-digital-innovation-partnerships-sdips-1>

To give some context the information on coverage is below.

Staffordshire: [Broadband Coverage and Speed Test Statistics for Staffordshire \(thinkbroadband.com\)](http://thinkbroadband.com)

Staffordshire Moorlands: [Broadband Coverage and Speed Test Statistics for Staffordshire Moorlands \(thinkbroadband.com\)](http://thinkbroadband.com)

The best way to summarise this data is as follows:-

	Staffordshire	Staffordshire Moorlands
Superfast broadband coverage (>30Mbps):	96.65%	92.03%
Gigabit capable (≥ 1,000Mbps):	62.36%	34.10%
Full Fibre:	33.09%	10.21%
USO eligible (<10Mbps):	1.23%	3.53%

The next step in improving speeds across Staffordshire Moorlands is through Project Gigabit which is delivered by Staffordshire County Council. BDUK are currently redesigning the procurement approach to attract interest of more suppliers. UK Gigabit Voucher is being updated and relaunched to support upgrade opportunities for the foreseeable future, when this is relaunched we will provide information through our Business Newsletter and signpost enquiries.

[Staffordshire Public Review closure notice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Project Gigabit Delivery Plan - summer update 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

It is anticipated that 80% of the gigabit capable coverage will be supplied through commercial activity which is currently underway. As this is commercial activity we have limited influence on the areas serviced. Project Gigabit will be supported by public intervention to fill the commercial gaps which are evident in the District.

Our main support mechanism is to signpost to the mainstream delivery agents.

Moving forward when we receive the UK Shared Prosperity Funding there is budget allocated in the Investment Plan for delivery of investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities. This will be developed and procured through the UKSPF Board over the coming months to support communities and businesses across the District.

BDUK have published [A Councillor's Guide to Project Gigabit - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) that may be a useful resource."

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder confirmed that he would be meeting with colleagues from the County Council but could not confirm when free wifi would be available in the three towns. A report would be presented for scrutiny in due course.

4. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Communities received from Cllr Nigel Yates:

"Can further clarification be given on the Covid Recovery Fund in respect of the amount available (unallocated/unspent) in the fund, details of spending to date and the potential purposes of the fund now that it can be linked to Cost of Living matters?"

Response:

"The Covid Recovery Fund was established at the end of 2019/20 to 'create a new reserve to fund future costs of the Covid-19 recovery programme'. The reserve exists to provide for the situation where **the Council incurs costs or loses revenue** as a result of the lasting effects of the pandemic. No costs have been charged to the reserve to date and, consequently, the reserve still has a balance of £600,000. This reserve remains earmarked for any impacts of Coronavirus on the Council's finances."

In response to supplementary questions it was confirmed the emergency funding was provided by the Government for the Council's leisure centre contractors during the pandemic which ensured re-opening after lockdowns. The Covid Recovery Fund was created using the Council's own resources to cover any extra costs due to the Covid recovery. This risk was now diminishing but a contingency was still required given that there was no further government funding. The Council had allocated an emergency fund to support community groups during the cost of living crisis. As some cost of living issues stem from Covid further funding may be allocated from the Covid Recovery Fund if required.

5. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change received from Councillor Andrew Hart:

"Having read the report and Information Digest for the Community Orchards project can the Portfolio Holder explain why there is no reference to costs incurred by AES?"

Response:

"The report highlights the additional costs to the Council. The work carried out by AES took place under the 'Business as Usual' agreed services that form part of the service specification agreed with AES at its conception."

In response to supplementary questions the Portfolio Holder confirmed that lessons had be learnt from the roll-out of the Community Orchard Programme and that aftercare would be ensured for future planting via community groups/AES. A response would be issued with regards to the risk section of the Cabinet report issued in May 2021. It was estimated that 30% of trees would not survive which was why the Council focuses its efforts during the planting season to maximise success rates.

45 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC:**

RESOLVED:

That, pursuant to Section 100A(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 100 I (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Paragraphs indicated.

46 **TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER PROCEDURE RULE NO. 10, IF ANY.**

6. Question to the Portfolio Holder for Communities received from Cllr Linda Malyon:

In response to a question raised by Councillor L. Malyon with regards to the operation of the Council's CCTV system the Leader of the Council confirmed that political group leaders would be invited to visit the CCTV monitoring station.

The meeting closed at 7.49 pm

_____Chairman_____Date