

Minutes of **Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee**

Meeting date **Monday, 12 June 2023**

Members present: Councillors Will Adams (Chair), Michael Green (Vice-Chair), David Howarth, Will King, Nicky Peet, Pete Pillinger and Haydn Williams

Officers: Darren Cranshaw (Head of Democratic Services) and Ben Storey (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Guests: Councillor Paul Foster (Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member (Policy, Reform & Communications) and Leader of the Labour Group), Louise Mattinson (Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer), Victoria Willett (Director of Change and Delivery), Darren Cranshaw (Head of Democratic Services) and Ben Storey (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Other members: Councillors Keith Martin, Angela Turner, Margaret Smith and attending virtually Councillors Lou Jackson, Lesley Pritchard, Harry Hancock, Karen Walton, Emma Stevens, Mathew Forshaw, Damian Bretherton, Aniela Bylinski Gelder, Matt Campbell, Caleb Tomlinson, Ian Watkinson and Kath Unsworth

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1 Apologies for Absence

None – all members of the committee were present.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Michael Green declared a personal interest as a member of the Leyland Town Deal Board and a member of Lancashire County Council should any references be made to either of those organisations during the meeting.

The Council's Code of Conduct allows members to remain in the meeting and fully participate where a personal, and not a prejudicial or pecuniary interest, is declared.

3 Quarter Four Performance Monitoring Report 2022-2023

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council and the Director of Change and Delivery to the meeting to present the most recent quarterly performance monitoring report.

The Committee heard that overall performance had been pleasing with the majority of projects and targets discussed within the report on or above target. There had been issues with the credit union which had impacted on achieving the desired performance targets, however an action plan on how to resolve these issues was

included within the report. With being such a large scheme, the Council was working with the Town Deal Board and Government to realign the procurement processes and the programme to ensure the project remained in budget and the timescales it was required to. Finally, the Jubilee Gardens project had been impacted by inflationary pressures and a review was currently underway of its design and key outputs with a report expected to go to Cabinet and Council in the next month.

On plans for the Corporate Strategy moving forward following the recent elections, the Committee were advised that work was underway in reviewing the priorities of the new administration. Following further discussions with officers and the wider Labour group a new Corporate Strategy would be presented to Council in September for adoption.

The Music in the Park event was highlighted by the Committee, with questions raised over how the success of the event was measured, the return on investment and future plans for the event. In response members heard that the aim of the event was to be cost neutral, yet providing a huge boost to local businesses and a great event for residents and visitors to enjoy. Analysis on the return on investment was being reviewed, in addition to other feedback, and would be completed soon. The Council hoped to continue the event in future years, the 33% increase in attendance from last year demonstrated there was a demand and provided scope to expand the event.

Queries were raised whether the July 2023 launch date of the Council's Social Prescribing Service was still realistic and viable. The Committee were told that the recruitment process had been completed with the team in place and ready to start taking referrals in July.

In response to a query on the Cost of Living Crisis Action Plan, Members were reassured that the Action Plan would form part of the Corporate Strategy and due to an increase in demand further work was underway to bring in partners where possible in order to best support residents. The Committee were grateful for the offer of further statistics on the numbers and effectiveness of the current support the Council has in place.

The challenges around developing greater uptake in digital skills training was raised by the Committee. As these sessions had not been active through the pandemic it had been a slow process to build back up to the pre-pandemic levels. The committee was pleased to hear that now it was re-established and benchmarking undertaken, monitoring of the digital skills training would be measured in future quarterly reports.

A number of questions were asked regarding the Unify Credit Union. Members were informed that the new Cabinet Member overseeing this area was liaising with community hub chairs to explore ways to better facilitate outreach work by the credit union. It was acknowledged that there would be staffing costs to consider but extending of the Credit Union offices opening hours would be also be looked at. The Committee were advised that a number of council's teams involved with community intervention work had regular contact with the Credit Union in order to provide the best support available to residents. Responding to a question about the Council's financial contribution to the Credit Union and how value for money is ensured, it was agreed that further detail be provided to the Committee after the meeting.

Following a question as to why there were only two successful applications for the Business Energy Efficiency scheme out of the 90 received, it was explained to the Committee that this was likely a timing issue of the reporting period. It was noted that the relevant due diligence and energy audits undertaken as part of the process may be a factor, in addition to the possibility of some applications not meeting the criteria. The Committee appreciated the offer of an update on the scheme being provided.

The Committee heard reassurances that the town deal programme would be delivered in the timescales agreed with the Government and for that reason the project remained as amber instead of red. With being such a large and long programme of development further consultation with businesses and other stakeholders had been undertaken with amendments to some of the phasing of work being considered to mitigate any disruption to the local area. Changes to the procurement strategy were also being considered to reduce risk by merging the development into one larger contract, mitigating for inflationary pressures since the contract was first agreed by the Council and potentially benefiting from economies of scale.

The rationale behind Progress Homes managing the Council's new houses at the former McKenzie Arms site was due to the Council not having its own commercial team in place currently. The agreement with Progress Homes had a two year break clause which would allow time for the Council to develop their own commercial team so in the long term they would manage these properties, Jubilee Gardens once completed and other new developments in the future. Members heard that there was surplus from the rental income from the new properties with the hope that any additional income could be used to support the administrations ambitions of building more new homes.

The Committee sought reassurance that given the inflationary pressures on the Jubilee Gardens scheme and what contingencies were in place. In response Members heard that contingencies were in place within the financial model. Whilst a number of options around value engineering the scheme or reducing room sizes had been dismissed, there was a proposal to amend and increase the capacity of the facility to provide additional income.

Prevention of homelessness and the support offered by the Council was highlighted. It was reported that the Council, working with key partners, was committed doing as much as it can to support people facing homelessness. The Action Plan in place involves a range of support including mediation support for families, support for young people to prevent homelessness and help arranging suitable accommodation. The full service review, including the wider homelessness strategy would be on the agenda for the July meeting of Cabinet and would be reviewed bi-annually to monitor outcomes.

Following a query on the Select Move criteria, the Committee welcomed the offer for further information.

On where performance of the contact centre could be improved, questions were asked whether weekly forecasting could better inform the resourcing needs of the service and if this would support delivery of performance targets. Members were advised that statistics were monitored by the Cabinet Member overseeing this service. Predicting call volumes had been challenging in response to a number of evolving and changing external issues affecting residents given the range of services

the Council delivers. It was acknowledged that changes in the telephony and new technology would also improve the service for residents in the long term.

The Committee expressed a desire to invite the new Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Digital to a future meeting to consider these matters in greater depth.

Following a comment on deferral of applications by the Planning Committee it was agreed that members be advised of the implications and the risk of non-determination.

It was subsequently;

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee;

1. thanks the leader and director for attending and answering questions;
2. welcomes the success of Music in the Park and looks forward to an evaluation of return on investment and future plans being made available to members;
3. is grateful for the offer of further information and statistics with regards to the uptake of the cost of living support;
4. asks that the council work with the credit union to increase the opening hours of their office and to provide outreach to other parts of the borough;
5. asks for further information on the councils contribution to the credit union and how the council ensures value for money;
6. welcomes the offer of a response to the query raised on the criteria of the Select Move process;
7. invites the new cabinet member for Customer and Digital to the next meeting to discuss customer services indicators, including the abandoned call rates and;
8. asks that the new planning committee be advised of the implications of deferring applications and the risk of non-determination.

4 Revenue Budget Outturn 2022-23

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council and the Director of Finance to the meeting to present the most recent quarterly revenue budget monitoring report.

The Committee heard that the Council was in a strong financial position and despite challenges arising from increasing energy costs and the recent pay award had an under spend of £300,000 at year end. It was noted that higher interest rates had resulted in greater return on savings than was forecast.

Regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, there was prescribed criteria set out in order to allocate funding which had presented challenges. The Committee welcomed

the offer to provide the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Business Plan following the meeting.

On the reliance on agency staff and the cost impact for the Council, the Committee ascertained that in the face of ongoing challenges around recruitment, permanent Heads of Service had been appointed with further appointments nearing completion for vacant senior posts, also on a permanent basis. A full breakdown of vacancies and costs would be provided to the Committee.

In addition to advertising posts on the Council's social media platforms, Members were advised that where appropriate recruitment consultants were appointed to source applicants for senior posts but overall in the past year there had been an increase in uptake in vacant posts. Further details on the effectiveness on the use of recruitment platforms, such as LinkedIn would be provided to the Committee.

Questions were asked about how to improve occupancy and income through marketing the council's commercial assets, such as the banqueting suite and whether an action plan was in place. A detailed review of the Council's assets had been initiated by the new Cabinet Member which would consider all of these areas. In addition it was noted that a review of the commercial use of the Civic Centre was being carried out with the aim of maximising the use of the building.

The Committee raised concerns over the apprenticeship budget not being fully utilised. Responding to the query the Council's commitment to encouraging and supporting apprenticeship schemes was reaffirmed. Further information would be provided, though it was suggested that the under spend in the apprenticeship budget could be a timing issue, or where apprentices were successfully applying for other vacant posts at the Council and associated costs going back into the budget.

It was subsequently;

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee;

1. thanks the leader and director for attending and answering questions;
2. welcomes the offer of a copy of the UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund) Business Plan being provided to the committee;
3. asks that the total agency and contractor costs mapped across the directorate staffing underspends be provided;
4. encourages the greater use of LinkedIn and other social media platforms to attract and recruit employees to the council and;
5. requests that the apprenticeship underspends be explored further.

5 Capital and Balance Sheet Outturn 2022-23

The Chair welcomed the Leader of the Council and the Director of Finance to the meeting to present the most recent quarterly monitoring report on the Capital Programme and Balance Sheet.

Queries around the varuances within the capital budget were addressed, delays in projects and slippage were the main reason why budget had being carried over into the following subsequent financial year. It was also noted that a number of significant payments had been made on the Jubilee Gardens, Town Deal and Leisure Centre refurbishment projects in April this year, just missing the reporting deadline for the quarter on 31 March 2023.

Responding to concerns raised over delays in processing Disabled Facilities Grants, the Committee were advised that there were lengthy delays in undertaking the initial assessments by Lancashire County Council. The Leader of the County Council had recently been contacted about this matter, outlining South Ribble Borough Council's desire to explore alternative options to carry out occupational health assessments to expedite the grant application process. Further details and a copy of the letter sent to the Leader of Lancashire County Council would be provided to the Committee.

In relation to funding for the Leisure Local scheme not being fully utilised, Members were advised that this was due to the time it took for a thorough assessment of proposed projects to be undertaken and that any other under spend in budget would remain and be ready to be used when future applications are received.

On the review of vehicle and plant replacement, it was confirmed that this was underway with a report expected soon which would consider both the environmental implications as well as the cost implications.

The grant capital expenditure for facilities at Lostock Hall Academy referenced within the report was raised. It was confirmed that approval for the grant funding had been agreed by Council and appropriate due diligence had been carried out before Lostock Hall Academy received the funding. The Council were aware of issues raised by residents concerning the installation of floodlights and the use of the sports facilities out of school hours and were liaising with the residents and the Academy to reach a resolution.

It was subsequently;

Resolved: (Unanimously)

That the Corporate, Performance and Budget Scrutiny Committee;

1. thanks the leader and director for attending and answering questions;
2. requests that further focus be given to reduce the level of slippage in the capital programme;
3. expresses concern of the delays with the County Council turning Disabled Facilities Grant referrals around and;
4. wishes the leader well in his lobbying of the county council and in making alternative arrangements for progressing Disabled Facilities Grant applications.

6 Committee Matters

7 Meetings and training attended by Members

No training attend by committee members was noted.

8 Cabinet Forward Plan

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

9 Arrangements for Committee Training and Workshop

The Head of Democratic Services informed the Committee that the North West Employers Strategic Scrutiny Network was scheduled for the following week.

Dr Steph Snape would also be delivering scrutiny committee training on Monday 3 July.

It was also proposed to hold a workshop session to develop the committees work programme for the remainder of the year and beyond on Tuesday 11 July.

Chair

Date