

SOUTH RIBBLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Committee

Meeting held at 6.00pm on Monday, 23 June 2014 in Wheel Room, Civic Centre, West Paddock, Leyland PR25 1DH

Present:

Councillors Mr M J Titherington (in the chair), Mr C Coulton, Mr M A Green, Mr K E L Jones, Mrs S Jones, Mr K J Martin, Mr A F Ogilvie, Mr J W M Otter, Mr M V Tomlinson, Miss F A Walker, Mrs L R Woollard

In Attendance:

Darren Cranshaw (Scrutiny and Performance Officer) and Dave Lee (Democratic Services Officer)

Public Attendance: 1

Officers: 3

Other Members: Councillors W Bennett and Forrest

Minute No.	Description/Resolution
1	<p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor M Gardner.</p>
2	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>Councillor K Jones declared a personal interest as an elected governor of the Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, and was able under the Code of Conduct for Elected Members to take part in the discussion and voting thereon. Councillor Martin declared a personal interest in items 2, 4, 6 and 7 as an employee of Lancashire County Council, and was able under the Code of Conduct for Elected Members to take part in the discussion and voting thereon.</p>
3	<p>Minutes of the Last Meeting</p> <p>RESOLVED (UNANIMOUS): that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chairman.</p>
4	<p>Performance Monitoring Report – year end 2013/14 (April 2013 to March 2014)</p> <p>Councillor Mrs M Smith (Leader of the Council) and Ian Parker (Director of Corporate Governance and Business Transformation) attended to present the report and were joined by three other members of the Cabinet (Councillors Mullineaux (Deputy Leader and Neighbourhoods and Street Scene), P J Smith (Regeneration, Leisure and Healthy Communities) and Hughes (Strategic Planning and Housing) in responding to comments/enquiries from the committee.</p> <p>The report outlined the council's performance from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 against its Corporate Plan (measures of success/targets/key actions), budget and financial performance and risk management. This showed how the council was performing to ensure it was delivering on the key things that matter to the borough and ensure it continued to improve. The results showed that 19 out of the 21 measures of success that could be measured had</p>

been achieved during the year. The results of the corporate survey were very pleasing at over 95% satisfied overall: with the council; the local area as a place to live; the waste and recycling collection service; and confidence in South Ribble as a safe place. The council had continued to achieve efficiencies, successfully delivering £515,000 (with Council Tax frozen for the fourth time in 5 years). A summary of the significant financial variances (underspends) was set out on page 5 of the report submitted. The council continued to increase: the occupancy of its commercial properties; the use of leisure centres; the investment to the borough's parks and open spaces; and the proactive approach to environmental enforcement. Significant progress had been made by the council in light of the City Deal that would potentially generate £1bn of investment over the next ten years.

The Leader was pleased to present this excellent year-end report 2013/14. The report's format had been changed to be more helpful and easy to understand.

The committee acknowledged that the report was very positive it was wondered as the report was assessing performance against the objectives and targets set by the council, whether the corporate plan was ambitious enough. The committee further enquired as to whether the corporate plan could be made more challenging and achieve more for residents in the future. The Leader commented that the results were very good. The Leader felt that the objectives and targets had been set at the right level for people to achieve realistically. The Leader added that the staff were well motivated, working really hard and stretched enough.

In respect of what process was used in setting targets following the committee's previous concerns over the targets set within the corporate plan that were not very challenging and would not stretch the council to do even better, the Director reported that one key target kept was the Council Tax recovery target (97.5%) that exceeded expectations. The Director used this target as an example and explained how this was reviewed on a "like for like" basis to see what had been achieved historically and what could be done differently. The Director further explained the process used and what steps had been taken into account to set this target, some of these being: the effect of the local council tax support scheme; recovery rate of local service provision; how the overall collection rate would be unattainable if the universal collection rate was made more unrealistic and rigorous; the speed of processing work; and how other external factors that might improve the council's performance. All factors had been taken into account by the council's Senior Management Team and the Cabinet to ensure targets set were stretching but realistic.

The committee referred to Target 16 (Appendix 1 page 4 of the report submitted) relating to ratings of residents' satisfaction with the council and although the result was pleasing it felt that this target (72%) was set too low despite it was previously mentioned last year. The Director explained that he was asked to look into this following last year's impressive customer satisfaction results that was gathered by Gateway. The committee's comments from last year had been noted however a brand new process was in place whereas the survey was collated month by month (rolling basis). The results of the new tailored survey remained in the high 90% mark and to ensure previous results were not accidental, it was decided that the existing target would be kept. The questions in the survey followed a scriptive formulae and the Director was satisfied that this year's extraordinary results reflected customers experience more accurately. The results were based upon residents' views of all types of service areas provided by the council.

There had been an increased number of residents registered with E-citizen and although a suggestion was made last year as to whether a survey could be carried out by email with this type of client group, the committee still felt that there would almost certainly be an element of bias built in the feedback if these were returned as the council was encouraging residents to make online payments where possible.

As the figures were in the high 90% mark for some time, questions were asked as to whether the responses to the survey were from residents or people using council services. Clarification was also sought as to whether the survey was based on how people felt about Gateway or the council. The Leader commented that the figures were a guide to assess how the council was performing. At present the survey was extended to the wider field, this included people accessing different parts or points of the council's services. The questions in the survey followed a set format and some calls were monitored and could easily be checked if anything came to light as being slightly skewed or not quite correct.

In respect of the definition of a frontline service and what would be classed as an efficiency (in particular with the Neighbourhood and the former Catering Services), the Leader explained that the definition of a front line service was an obligation/statutory requirement that the council had a duty to provide for the public. The Leader provided examples, some of these being: waste collection that was continuing to be performing efficiently and to the very highest standards; and the processing of planning applications to meet strict targets/deadlines set by central government. Examples of non-statutory services were provided, some of these being: Leisure Services that was still performing extremely well particularly with the increased take up of new memberships despite the impact of the economic downturn; the closure of the in-house catering service due to financial pressures the council was under (the decision had no reflection on the services previously provided); and the standards of the borough's parks were still exceedingly high that retained the three Green Flags. The Leader reiterated that front line services were still achieving very good results however there were other areas that were not front line that the council still carry out to the very highest standards.

In relation to the requirement for Neighbourhood Services to generate £176,000 in efficiency savings last year, both the Leader and the Deputy Leader confirmed that this had been achieved in 2013/14. The efficiency savings were generated from the structural changes within the service. From the audience, the Director of Neighbourhoods and Street Scene added that it was a whole mixture items/combination of things that contributed to the £176,000 of efficiency savings such as the number of vacancies, transport, vehicles etc. He assured the committee that it did not impact on front line services (litter picking, grass cutting etc).

The committee expressed concern over recent press reports that the European Union was to raise the bar for household recycling percentages. Although, the recycling rate continued to be relatively high, the committee asked what steps were being taken to increase the recycling rate further. The Deputy Leader reported that in relation to recycling waste, the council had to work within certain parameters. At present the council can only recycle certain types of plastics compared to some countries in Europe where they collect different types of plastics. Until the restrictions were lifted the council had no ability to increase on that. The Deputy Leader agreed that other household recyclable items would increase the rate. In respect of the question concerning funding from Lancashire County Council, the Deputy Leader said that the contract was currently with the county council until the end of 2018. Until the council was made aware of the county council's position it would be difficult to make any decisions at present on this matter.

With regard to regular feedback from residents over the confusion of what type of plastics that could be recycled and whether there were any reported incidents at Farington Waste Recovery Park of contamination as a result of incorrect plastics collected, the Deputy Leader informed the meeting that as far as he was aware there was very little contamination. All materials were checked at the site and there were no reported incidents of incorrect plastics collected.

Reference was made to bullet point 4 (page 3 of the report submitted) with regard to the proactive approach to zero tolerance on dog fouling, litter and fly tipping and the committee noted that there had only been two additional fixed penalty notices issued compared to last year. The committee enquired as to what more could be carried out to increase this figure as dog fouling and litter was a major concern to residents. The Deputy Leader explained that there had been a pilot with marker spray introduced in Farington. The trial proved very successful in the area as it demonstrated that dog fouling was a real issue. The intention was to roll this out across the borough. A Leyland Ward Member was currently interested in this scheme and the Deputy Leader was currently liaising with her over the feasibility of introducing this in the Leyland areas. In respect of a question regarding the number of reported incidents (667) received by Gateway, the Deputy Leader felt that 2 per day (on average) were not overly excessive and added that the majority of these logged by Gateway would almost certainly be incidents without the need for further action. The Deputy Leader commented that the council continued to take a tough stance on environmental crime and adopted a zero tolerance approach in enforcing these matters however sometimes it could be very difficult to prosecute perpetrators. The Deputy Leader indicated that he was happy to roll out the pilot with marker spray to all borough wards if any members were interested. Although the Deputy Leader had no problems over residents taking part in the pilot however some people would almost certainly be reluctant to come forward.

Referring to whether the council could mount a major campaign in keeping South Ribble clean, the Deputy Leader reported that this had and continued to be well publicised to ensure that awareness was maintained with residents and the public. The Deputy Leader noted the suggestion made to look at other councils regarding different ideas and awareness as part of the proactive approach to keep the borough clean. The Leader concurred with the Deputy Leader and added that at the end of the day it was down to education for all ages and not just for the next generation.

Whilst the overall crime was reducing, the committee asked the reason why there was local intelligence in the Penwortham area of an increase in thefts and other serious crimes and whether the Multi-Agency Task and Co-ordination (MATAC) groups still take place to solve local issues. The Leader explained that unfortunately the council did not produce the figures/statistics. They were supplied to the council by collecting agents from the Safer Chorley and South Ribble Partnership. There would almost certainly be a mixture of half crime or visited crime within the statistics produced and the council would not necessarily know why there was a drop in a particular area. The Deputy Leader felt that although there were significant cuts being made, the good partnership working continued to be developed successfully. It was important to build on the excellent work already achieved to ensure that crime remained low year on year. MATAC normally meet on a six monthly basis unless there was a significant problem in an area. The group comprised of the police, community and different types of agencies that focus on reacting to crime trends, patterns and hotspot areas. Meetings were held between the Superintendent, Chief Executive, Leader and Deputy Leader every three months and if there were any incidents the council should be aware of, the Superintendent would directly liaise with the Chief Executive.

The committee referred to bullet point 7 (page 3 of the report submitted) in respect of the Economic Development Team supporting 300 plus businesses and asked what kind of support had been provided. The committee was also interested to know what had the impact of this support been and whether there were other agencies better placed to support businesses. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure and Healthy Communities referred to the Investment in South Ribble booklet (published every quarter) and informed the meeting that the council supported people in various ways some of these being: people looking for properties that the council help to find through the evaluative website; people that want help in businesses; directing people in businesses in the right direction to access available funding; regular town team meetings to discuss business relationships; and continuing to look at other town and district centres (Penwortham, Longton etc). Details of all

the support provided by Economic Development were kept on record and the level of success was continuously monitored. In general employment within the borough was very good. The Leader added that the council's decision to reduce business rates to help stimulate growth was an absolute fantastic initiative especially for small businesses. This good incentive particularly helped new businesses with certain overheads.

In respect of what support and/or impact the "Big Do" had in actually supporting people/businesses, the Leader provided the committee with an example of how this was a useful new type of networking event that brought all types of organisations in South Ribble together to make new contacts and build relationships. This also offered guest speakers, interactive workshops and promotional marketplace. The Leader was happy for a Members' Learning Hour to be arranged on the council's business support service.

Referring to the new Public Health arrangements that came into operation, the committee was interested to know what the key achievements of the Chorley and South Ribble Health and Wellbeing Partnership were over the last 12 months. The committee's review of health inequalities had been held up as best practice nationally and was being rolled out as a model across Lancashire. Many of the partners were implementing the review's recommendations. The committee asked when the Cabinet would consider some of the key recommendations allocated to South Ribble Borough Council. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure and Healthy Communities commented that the biggest achievement was keeping the partnership going. Some of the other major achievements being: the first health impact assessment (commissioned and paid for by the county council); Warm Homes Funding (county- wide funding to help elderly and vulnerable householders to stay warm and safe in their homes); and the partnership was currently looking at the Disability Facilities Grant. The Leader added that the problem at present was that there was no clear definition of what the council's statutory responsibility was within a particular area and the Health and Wellbeing Partnership was in a similar position. At present the difficulty was that there were no defined roles, what the obligations were, what was required and whether there were any devolved budget to carry out the work. There had been regular meetings with relevant partners to try and keep them on board.

The council's reserves now stood more than the council's annual budget. The committee enquired as to the reasons why this was so high and whether central government could claw back the reserves. The Leader agreed that the reserves were at quite a level at present but there were reasons for that. The council had recently paid £2m to the pensions fund so those reserves would automatically come down by that amount. The Leader provided a brief explanation about the business rates. For this reason it was decided that monies would be taken from business rates and placed into the reserves to build up some resilience to ensure the council was fully covered. Similar to VAT, the business rates would need to be paid instantly and the amount would disappear accordingly. The Leader commented that this was still being work through and the council would have a clearer picture at the next scheduled meeting of the Governance Committee on Wednesday, 25 June 2014. In respect of the question with regard to interest rates, the Leader agreed that they had been low for a long time however the council had been utilising a number its reserves. Those that had been earmarked had plans against them to be used in the near future. In general, the reserves would be lowered in due course. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure and Healthy Communities added that it was important to note that the auditors commended this council for having reserves and the ability to accumulate some reserves at the time when there was financial uncertainty within the public sector. The council had some very good reports from both the auditor and the Audit Commission.

Reference was made to the 90% occupancy of the town centre retail units and how this target had always been achieved, the committee asked what work was being done to bring the measure back on track as nationally we had recover from the recession. The enquiry

	<p>included whether there were any further problems and how confident the council was that this would be brought back on track. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure and Healthy Communities reported that in terms of the number of properties operating, it was actually greater than last year although the percentage was lower. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure and Healthy Communities added that the high street retail economy was under significant pressure from the economic climate and also from changes in shopping trends. The prime example was internet shopping and if the community did not support/use their local shops/local businesses then it was the case of “use them or lose them”. An enquiry was made as to the reasons why there was a target only for Leyland, and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure and Healthy Communities indicated that Leyland had been identified as the major commercial centre in South Ribble’s Local Development Framework (LDF) and the Central Lancashire Core Strategy.</p> <p>RESOLVED (UNANIMOUS): that –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the committee congratulates the Council on its performance during 2013/2014 and the significant efficiencies achieved. 2. the committee commends the Council for signing up to the Preston, South Ribble and Lancashire City Deal. 3. the committee welcomes the fact that the committee’s comments on the corporate customer survey were implemented and that carrying out an electronic survey be explored further. 4. the committee looks forward to the Corporate Plan targets for the current year being reviewed in light of last year’s satisfaction survey results to ensure that they are robust. 5. the committee requests a breakdown of how the proposed efficiencies for the current financial year will be delivered and the impact of those efficiencies. 6. the dog fouling marking/alert pilot be rolled out across the Borough. 7. the Council mounts a publicity campaign to encourage residents to keep their area clean and include the My Neighbourhood Forums. 8. a Member Learning Hour be arranged on the Council’s business support service. 9. further information on the occupancy rates of other town and district centres be shared with the Scrutiny Committee.
5	<p>Our People Plan Outturn 2013/2014, Draft Our People Plan 2014/2015 and Employee Survey Results</p> <p>Councillor Mrs M Smith (Leader of the Council) remained present to address the meeting. She was joined by Steve Nugent (Head of Human Resources) in responding to comments and enquiries from the committee.</p> <p>The report presented the outturn for 2013/14 and progress and achievements against the plan was detailed in Appendix A, and the proposed plan for 2013/15 was attached at Appendix B. Areas of good progress included: the results of the 2013 Employee Survey; the Health and Wellbeing of the workforce (various activities taking place in the past year); continuation of the leadership development within the management structure; and commencement of the Coaching Programme. There were still areas for further action some of these being: sickness absence performance had increased for the first time in five years; the number of completed performance appraisals fell lower compared to last year; Gold Health Work Award being removed from the workforce targets as the award no longer exists; and issues arising from the Employee Survey results regarding communications that needed to be addressed. An action plan to improve communications had been prepared by the Core Managers Group and would be implemented.</p> <p>The survey had been reviewed, streamlined and made simpler, but not too different to still enable comparisons with previous surveys.</p>

The committee recommended last year that the Our People Plan actions for the current year be reviewed to ensure that they were SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound), and it wondered why this recommendation had not been implemented and the reason why it had not been taken on board for the new Our People Plan. The Head of Human Resources explained that this was a two year plan that would lead up to 2015. The Head of Human Resources understood that the committee's previous advice was for future plans. Next year's plan would be for a longer period of time and would look differently. It would add a different feel to it and would certainly contain smarter measures.

An enquiry was made by the committee as to what had been done to improve the sickness figures and the reasons why the report submitted mentioned that there were five Lancashire councils who had performed better. The committee also asked whether there was an update on this figure as part of the six months performance monitoring report. The Leader explained that the sickness figures had gradually been coming down over the years. Unfortunately there was a blip this year because the council had three employees on long term sickness (over twelve months). The Leader was hopeful that the situation did not occur again and that they would return to full health. The Leader added that referrals to Occupational Health (in more serious cases) would be made to provide employees with support, treatment and specialist advice in line with the council's Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure.

A discussion ensued on the breakdown of reasons for absences (particularly referring to stress, anxiety and depression). The Leader reported that the council would take remedial action if stress was through a work issue. Each breakdown would have a history however the list would be too long for the committee if everything was broken down into different components. The Head of Human Resources added that he was happy to build more details into future reports as part of the council's monitoring of sickness absences.

In respect of what arrangements were put in place to cover work when employees were on long term sick leave, the Leader explained that various options would be considered and then arrangements would be put in place. Sometimes the council would consider temporary staff or bring in temporary cover for example moving staff from one section to another to cover the post. The Leader assured the committee that in such circumstances the work would be fully covered and the returning employee would not have to deal with any backlog.

The committee expressed concern that only 72% of appraisals had been carried out against a target of 95%. The committee asked why this figure was low and what steps were being taken to achieve this target. The Leader reported that the Head of Human Resources had identified these service areas and she was aware that he was liaising with the managers. The deadline had been set and for whatever reason some have decided that in this moment in time they could not fulfil that deadline. The Head of Human Resources commented that the percentages were normally reported in August however as the deadline had been brought forward the figures were based at the time the report was written. Appraisals were still coming back and it was hoped that by August 2014 the target would almost certainly be achieved. The Head of Human Resources accepted that the issue was about getting them back in on a timelier basis because it did impact on the ability to deliver on some other key areas of the plan.

Following complaints from employees at a Council meeting over the lack of communication and consultation in respect of the council's redundancy policy, the committee asked what had been learned from this experience and what steps were being taken to improve employee engagement. The Leader was aware that the Senior Management Team had discussed this issue and was taking active steps. The Head of Human Resources reported that one of the key messages that came back was cross service communications. The Senior Management Team was looking at certain areas some of these being: how to ensure communication was delivered: to be clear at each level of the council what the council was expected to do on

communication; and simple techniques on how the council could communicate better and get feedback as well. Both the Leader and the Head of Human Resources assured the committee that plans were in place to address the situation.

The committee expressed concern over the employee survey results that there was a downward trend for the applications of our values. The Leader reported that some of the questions in the employees' survey had been reviewed and changed therefore some of the things the council could not refer back to because they were not there before. In general most of the questions were based on what the council had from previous years. The Head of Human Resources added that this survey was conducted by an external specialist company, Collaboratory of Research and Consultancy Service (CRACS) based in East Lancashire. They strongly advised the council that the number of statements or questions responded to should be about that level and that was typical of the number of questions the council asked in the employee survey. In that way the council could get a good picture. The Head of Human Resources felt that it was helpful to have more statements for the council to track over time.

The future Our People Plan (Appendix B to the report submitted) that remained the same last year did not include any tangible actions to deal specifically with the feedback and areas for improvement identified in the employee survey. The committee asked whether it would be an opportune time to come up with a SMART Our People action plan to deal with the feedback from employees. The Leader informed the meeting that there was no problems for a progress report to come back in six months' time. The Head of Human Resources explained how the employee survey fell every 2 years and how this was factored into the Our People Plan. The Director added that although the employee survey was biennial, the results published had been taken very seriously and looked at across the board by the Senior Management Team and various services/directorate (in particular where backward arrows were shown). In respect of cross service communications, the Core Managers Group had met on several occasions and had developed their own requirements on to how best manage communication to address some of the issues that had been raised in this survey. A lot had been done following the results of the survey and a number of key things had been picked up in individual service plans to address any shortcomings in their own service areas. Every red arrow and even a 1% change had been critically reviewed in a more rigorous way this year.

The committee acknowledged that the figures were always high however it did not wish to see the standards slipping therefore it felt that it was appropriate to ask the questions.

In respect of the coaching training programme, the Head of Human Resources explained that there were currently six employees on the training programme that would lead to the Institute of Leadership Management (ILM) level 5 in coaching. This qualification was in conjunction with the county council's Training Development Centre and provided the knowledge, skills and confidence to perform effectively as coaches or mentors as part of their normal working role. This would enhance their existing skills set to support individuals and teams to higher levels of performance. In future this would introduce coaching and mentoring opportunities for employees. Human Resources would carry out a matching process and where appropriate potential coaches would then be matched up with an employee who wanted coaching.

RESOLVED (UNANIMOUS): that –

1. the committee welcomes that the employee survey results are positive.
2. the committee asks that a report on the actions and progress being made in responding to the feedback in the employee survey be presented to the Scrutiny Committee within six months.
3. an update on the progress being made in achieving the sickness absence target be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in six-month's time.

	<p>4. the committee expresses its concern at the low number of employee appraisals that have been carried out and requests a progress report at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.</p>
6	<p>Scrutiny Reviews</p> <p>(a) Joint Scrutiny Review: NHS Healthchecks – Draft Final Report</p> <p>The committee received a draft report on its task group’s joint review of NHS healthchecks.</p> <p>RESOLVED (UNANIMOUS): that the task group’s report on the Joint Scrutiny Review of NHS Healthchecks be endorsed.</p> <p>(b) Scrutiny Review: Planning – Draft Final Report</p> <p>The committee received a draft report on its task group’s review of planning in South Ribble. Councillor Green (chair of the task group) thanked all those involved in the excellent work of the task group. All members of the task group worked together really positively across party lines that showed an excellent example of how task groups should work.</p> <p>RESOLVED (UNANIMOUS): that the task group’s report on the Scrutiny Review of Planning in South Ribble be endorsed.</p>
7	<p>Update on Scrutiny Reviews and Scrutiny Matters</p> <p>(a) Scrutiny Work Programme 2014/15 - the committee agreed to conduct two cross-cutting reviews for 2014-2015:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partners’ preparation and response to the Ageing Population 2. Road injuries and casualties in South Ribble (jointly with Lancashire County Council’s Scrutiny Committee); <p>(b) Scrutiny Review of Drainage and Flooding – a meeting had been arranged with Lancashire County Council;</p> <p>(c) Local Health Scrutiny in South Ribble – the draft protocol had been received from the Centre of Public Scrutiny and would shortly be considered by the committee for endorsement (a representative would be in attendance to present the report);</p> <p>(d) Chairman’s verbal report from Lancashire County Council’s Health Scrutiny Committee – he had been unable to attend the last meeting of the committee however Councillor M Gardner attended on behalf of him and that the written report would be circulated to all members;</p> <p>(e) Member feedback on meetings and training attended on behalf of the committee – there were no items to feedback;</p> <p>(f) Forward Plans – the committee noted its forward plan and also that of the Cabinet</p>

..... Chairman

The meeting finished at 8.38pm