

SOUTH RIBBLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Committee

Meeting held at 6.00pm on Thursday 4 February 2016 in Wheel Room, Civic Centre, West Paddock, Leyland PR25 1DH

Present:-

Councillor Mrs Ball (in the chair)

Councillors Mrs Blow, M Tomlinson, Mrs K Walton, Watkinson, Wharton and Mrs Woollard

In Attendance:-

Darren Cranshaw (Scrutiny and Performance Officer) and Andy Houlker (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

Public Attendance:- 0

Other Members & Officers:- 1 officer

Minute No.	Description/Resolution
45	<p>Apologies for Absence Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Coulton, K Jones, Martin, Mrs B Nathan and Titherington.</p>
46	<p>Declarations of Interest There were no declarations of interest.</p>
47	<p>Draft Corporate Plan, Budget and Risk Register 2016-2017 The committee noted that following its decision to hold this special meeting, the Leader was unable to attend due to another appointment and the Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources had declined the invitation to attend. Therefore there was no one before the committee to answer questions.</p> <p>The chairman introduced the item outlining the background to the item being considered and the important role played by the committee. In doing so she referred to the four roles of scrutiny outlined in 'On the Money' guide produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scrutiny can challenge whether the processes are effective and accessible: is there a level of integration between corporate and service planning and performance and financial management? 2. Scrutiny can challenge how resources are allocated, monitor how they are used, and examines their impact. 3. It can test out and make explicit whether the Council is directing its resources effectively to meet its priorities and demonstrates whether it is achieving value for money. 4. Scrutiny provide an additional and transparent challenge to the Cabinet's management of the Council's finances. <p>The committee in discussing the council's Draft Corporate Plan, Budget and Risk Register 2016-2017 agreed the following comments/points to be forwarded to the Cabinet for when it considered this at its meeting on 10 February 2016.</p>

Draft Corporate Plan

1. Disappointed no feedback had been provided on the Scrutiny Committee's consultation response to the Cabinet towards the Corporate Plan, Budget and Risk agreed on 8 December 2015 and looks forward to receiving a response.
2. Notes that out of the 27 comments made by the Scrutiny Committee, just six appeared to have been taken forward in the draft Corporate Plan 2016/2017, with one action taken out.
3. The Corporate Plan was largely the same as previous years, without SMART actions and success measures, making it difficult to manage performance, be transparent and accountable. It was not felt possible to hold the Council, Cabinet and senior officers to account.
4. The Corporate Plan didn't always link with the budget/financial strategy.
5. Clean, Green and Safe – the zero tolerance approach to litter and dog fouling seemed to have been diluted in key action 4. Disappointed that the Cabinet member for Neighbourhoods & Street Scene referred to zero tolerance at the last scrutiny meeting extensively and that it had now been removed and should be put back.
6. Welcomed that many of the resident satisfaction targets have increased and were more realistic, but they could have been more ambitious.
7. The Scrutiny Committee had previously mentioned that Gateway's customer survey could not robustly measure general satisfaction and asked that this situation be improved.

Draft Corporate Risk Register

The committee had no comments.

Draft Financial Strategy, Budget and Council Tax 2016/2017

1. Welcomes, whilst still a lengthy document it was easier to read than in previous years, broken down in 'chunks' and key principles.
2. Page 1 – Recommendation 6: In the interests of transparency and accountability decisions around staffing should not be delegated. From the budget report the decision and impact was likely to be significant (potential £400K to be taken out of staffing budgets through re-structures etc., see page 33). The proposals should be presented to Scrutiny before Cabinet makes a decision.
3. Page 3 – A. Forecasted Outturn 2015/2016: forecasted underspend of £607k this financial year, whilst welcomed news as not as much needed to be taken from reserves - consideration should be given as to effectiveness of budgeting, financial planning and assumptions made. Improved confidence in the process was sought along with greater explanation.
4. Page 9 – 1. Business Rates Retention: Councils allowed to retain a proportion of any additional income generated from growing the tax base of business in their areas. Linked to this £100K was being invested in business support and place promotion (see page 18). Should growing the tax base for businesses be a measure in the Corporate Plan (similar to Chorley) so that the outcome could be measured and monitored.

5. Page 16 – Review of fees and charges - £80K: Proposal to charge for car parking at Withy Grove Park and Worden Park. An impact assessment on what effect this would have on local residents and roads around the parks should be carried out, LCC as highways authority should be consulted. Rationale for choosing these parks as opposed to others (and would they follow). Communication and engaging with residents and other agencies on introducing parking charges at these parks was really important.
6. Page 19 – Commends new Investment and Funding: The links with the corporate plan – outcomes and what was expected to be achieved should be explicit to ensure a return on investment.
7. Page 20 – E. Budget Consultation: No budget consultation was taking place. The report stated that consultation would take place on the Corporate Plan, but not how. There was no invitation in the reports or on the Council's website to encourage residents and businesses to provide their views (unlike other councils such as Chorley and the County Council etc.)
8. Page 21 – Summary: Welcomes ambitious capital programme over three years – was the capacity, skills and resources available to delivering the programme and how effective was the council's project management framework – any improvements needed. Re-assurance capacity to deliver all in a timely fashion. An example was given in that the Leyland My Neighbourhood's Leyland Loop Project had been delayed due to capacity issues.
9. Page 21 – Clean, green and safe - Worden Park Toilet Facilities (£150K) – pleased to see provided as raised at last week's Scrutiny Committee. Coin entry units to be provided – assumed users would have to pay to use them and the associated issues. Consideration be given to these facilities being introduced in other areas across the borough (including parks).
10. Page 25 – revenue reserves: Commends Borough Investment Account – little information about what this was, the governance, transparency and decision-making process, ensuring there was the commercial skills and experience involved to invest wisely, with examples of assets such as The Derby Wing being empty.
11. Page 25 – revenues reserves: Other - £1.3M appeared quite a lot of money to group together (non-specific), could this be presented in a more meaningful way.
12. Page 33 – Budget efficiency programme 2016/2017: A number of efficiency targets were included (Business Transformation: Environmental Health £100K, Neighbourhoods £50K) – what were the efficiencies, how were they going to be achieved, what would be the impact on services etc. Also, £236K to be taken from vacant posts, what kind of posts and the potential impact on services. More transparency might be helpful. Would the efficiency of £50K in Neighbourhoods affect enforcement and responding to littering and dog fouling issues etc.
13. Page 38 – New investment in capital projects: Welcomes the investment in Withy Grove Park (£250K) to bring up to the Green Flag standard – however, possibly be mindful of the revenue cost implications and commitment involved (following the last Green Flag feedback report on Worden Park).

The committee refrained from specific comments on the Housing Framework as the Cabinet member for Housing & Healthy Communities was scheduled to soon be before the committee at which he could reply to the committee's comments.

The committee appreciated the opportunity to be involved in the corporate plan and budget process which hopefully could be sooner in future. It also welcomed the Cabinet member for Finance & Resources' commitment to openness and transparency.

	<p>RESOLVED (unanimously) that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. the above comments/suggestions in respect of the Draft Corporate Plan, Budget and Risk Register 2016-2017 be forwarded to Cabinet for its consideration as part of its meeting on 10 February 2016; and2. the committee looks forward to receiving feedback from its comments from 8 December 2015 and also that the above comments to Cabinet for 10 February 2016 be provided back to the Scrutiny Committee.
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(The meeting finished at 6.36pm)

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