

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING DATE Thursday, 4 July 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors David Howarth (Chair), Michael Green (Vice-Chair), Will Adams, Matt Campbell, Colin Coulton, Malcolm Donoghue, Chris Lomax, Jim Marsh, Colin Sharples and Karen Walton

OFFICERS: Gary Hall (Interim Chief Executive), Darren Cranshaw (Assistant Director of Scrutiny & Democratic Services), Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer) and Jane Blundell (Deputy Section 151 Officer)

OTHER MEMBERS: Councillor Paul Foster (Leader of the Council and Leader of the Labour Group), Councillor Margaret Smith (Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Conservative Group) and Councillor Stephen Thurlbourn

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1 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Matthew Trafford.

2 Minutes of the Last Meeting

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 7 March 2019 be signed as a correct record by the Chair.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Michael Green declared a personal interest in Item 4 – Corporate Performance Report Quarter 4 (31 March 2019).

4 Corporate Performance Report Quarter 4 (31 March 2019)

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Paul Foster) and Interim Chief Executive (Gary Hall) addressed the Committee and responded to members' comments and enquiries relating to the corporate performance report at the end of Quarter 4.

The Leader emphasised the importance of the Scrutiny Committee receiving future reports prior to Cabinet and the Committee welcomed the offer.

During the discussion, the Committee's comments and enquiries focused around many performance-related topics highlighted in the report.

Reassurances were sought on the capacity of the senior Leadership Team following the departure of two Deputy Chief Executives and the timescale for their replacement. Mention was given to the appointment of the Council's Interim Chief Executive which led to a discussion on the progress of Shared Services arrangements with Chorley Council. Both councils have reaffirmed their commitment to the partnership and a report will be provided at the full Council meeting in September 2019 for endorsement.

The Committee also discussed financial issues outlined in the report and commended those involved in reducing the amount of debt written-off. An explanation of lettable assets and their scale was requested. It was reported that these are commercial assets with an annual revenue of £1 million.

Additionally, members queried the funding options being considered for the Ribble Crossing and were informed that talks are ongoing with the City Deal team. Emphasis was also placed on the involvement of central government for funding. Concern was also expressed over rumours that the opening of the Cross Borough Link Road had been delayed until autumn 2019. Confirmation of this was unavailable but assurances were given that officers would work to find out.

The report highlighted that progress on the City Deal project was 'off-track'. Members requested an update on the status of the project and were advised that a decision on how to progress development would be made by October 2019 and that members would be kept updated of progress. The committee also enquired as to how the town centre masterplans were being developed and expressed concern that relevant My Neighbourhood Forums had little involvement with the process.

An update on the delivery of the Cuerden Strategic Site was requested and the committee received assurances that meetings would take place with Lancashire County Council to re-engage with the process.

The commercialisation of both the Civic Centre and Worden Hall was a key topic for discussion. Members expressed confusion at the Civic Centre Commercialisation project being marked as complete despite phase 3 still being in progress. The status should reflect that phase 1 is complete and alternative methods of reporting were suggested.

Members queried the progress of the Worden Hall commercialisation project and the methods of public consultation used. It was reported that submitted bids which had not previously been considered were now being reviewed and that consultation would take place through My Neighbourhood Forums, the website and with local councillors and businesses.

The report highlighted that South Ribble continues to be recognised as a Dementia Friendly Community due to the work of the Dementia Action Alliance but members queried the council's involvement in this scheme. It was reported that this association is through the South Ribble Partnership, helping to coordinate exercises and events and training staff to recognise dementia.

Committee members requested further explanation as to the efforts for improving staff morale and supporting employees. It was stated that the council was re-engaging with trade unions and that a staff survey would be undertaken over the coming months to gain feedback on morale. In response to concerns around the

increase in complaints regarding refuse bins, it was reported that feedback was being taken into consideration about changing the council's policy and that other options would be explored in the Budget Outturn report later in the year.

The committee requested that future performance reports be more outcome-focused and asked that all reports are written in plain English with all acronyms explained. The Leader and Chief Executive were thanked for their attendance and the committee noted the good performance and progress made by the council.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That:

1. a breakdown of the Council's property asset income be circulated to Committee Members.
2. an explanation for the number of 'violence against person' offences being unavailable be provided to the Committee.
3. the report commissioned by the Leader on the Civic Centre commercialisation spending and on City Deal be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.
4. the Committee be provided with updates on the masterplans and rephrasing and resourcing them.
5. the Committee be provided with updates on the completion date of the Cross Borough Link Road.
6. the Risk Register be reviewed with Committee members.

5 Annual 2018/19 Corporate Plan Performance Report

The Committee identified many similarities between this item and item 6 – Corporate Performance Report Quarter 4 (31 March 2019) – and felt that the recommendations made from that report also covered this item.

6 South Ribble Borough Council Budget Outturn Report 2018/19

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Paul Foster) and Deputy Section 151 Officer (Jane Blundell) addressed the Committee and responded to members' comments and enquiries relating to the Budget Outturn Report 2018/19.

The Leader of the Council informed the Committee that the Council's Statement of Accounts would be delayed as the External Auditors could not sign them off by the statutory deadline. In response to this, the committee expressed concern and requested that they be kept updated on the situation.

The report detailed the Budget Outturn position for 2018-19 in relation to revenue and capital expenditure and informed the committee of variations in terms of underspends and overspends between service areas. The report also included information on business rates retention, investment interest and reserve amounts.

In response to underspend of £93,000 highlighted in the report, the effectiveness of the Council's budgeting process was questioned. The committee was assured that budget variations would be reassessed over the year.

The committee was informed that South Ribble Borough Council is part of the Lancashire Business Rate Pooling arrangement and what this specifically means. The assessment of risk surrounding business rate pooling was queried and assurances were provided that pooling was based on a 2019/20 rate and money was being set aside to mitigate risk.

Income sources were outlined to detail the revenue generated from fees and charges. In response to a query regarding the methodology used to project these income streams, it was acknowledged that some, such as planning applications, were difficult to assess.

The report highlighted that the Borough Investment Account had been increased by £770,000 in 2018-19 and was being used to facilitate income generation schemes and help the council to bridge the funding gap. The specific objectives of the Borough Investment account were queried and it was reported that no income targets had been specified but an emphasis would be placed on community investment.

The committee thanked the Leader and Deputy Section 151 Officer for their attendance.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That:

1. the Committee be kept updated on the status of the Council's accounts for 2018
2. line-by-line budget information be provided to the Committee

7 Scrutiny Matters

7a Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee Update

The Chair, Councillor David Howarth, provided the Committee with an update from the last meeting of Lancashire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee.

7b Meetings and training attended by Scrutiny Committee members

The Chair thanked those members of the Committee that attended training the week before and informed the Committee that he would be attending a Strategic Scrutiny in Practice training event later in the month.

7c Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan

The Committee discussed topics and issues that they would like to consider.

RESOLVED:

That

1. A standing Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel be established to consider future quarterly budget and performance monitoring reports on behalf of the committee to feed directly into Cabinet. Councillors David Howarth, Will Adams, Colin Coulton, Colin Sharples and Karen Walton will sit on this panel.

7d Cabinet Forward Plan

The Cabinet Forward Plan was noted.

Chair

Date