

- MINUTES OF SCRUTINY BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**
- MEETING DATE** Monday, 14 September 2020
- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Councillors David Howarth (Chair), Will Adams, Colin Coulton, Colin Sharples and Karen Walton
- CABINET MEMBERS:** Councillors Paul Foster (Leader of the Council), Mick Titherington (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member (Health, Wellbeing and Leisure)), Matthew Tomlinson (Cabinet Member (Finance, Property and Assets)) and Aniela Bylinski Gelder (Cabinet Member (Community Engagement, Social Justice and Wealth-Building))
- OFFICERS:** Gary Hall (Interim Chief Executive), James Thomson (Deputy Director of Finance), Howard Anthony (South Ribble Partnership Manager), Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships), Darren Cranshaw (Assistant Director of Scrutiny & Democratic Services) and Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer)
- OTHER MEMBERS:** Councillor Jacky Alty (Member Champion (Social Justice and Equality)) and Councillor Stephen Thurlbourn
- PUBLIC:** 0
- 15 Apologies**
- None.
- 16 Declarations of Interest**
- None.
- 17 Minutes of meeting Monday, 3 August 2020 of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel**
- RESOLVED: (Unanimously)
- That the minutes of th previous meeting, held on Monday, 3 August 2020, be approved as a correct record.
- 18 Matters Arising from Previous Meetings**
- Noted.

19 Period 1 (April - June) Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report 2020/21

The Panel considered a report of the Interim Chief Executive which outlined the Council's performance against the delivery of the Corporate Plan projects and objectives during Period 1 (April-June 2020).

Overall, performance of the projects was good, with 85% of projects either completed, succeeding or on-track.

It was acknowledged that efforts had been largely focused on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic during Period 1 and the Panel commended the council's approach to supporting residents during the pandemic. Reassurances were provided that the Council will continue to support residents.

Members noted the opportunity for additional efficiencies as a result of an increase in online transactions due to the coronavirus pandemic and queried the progress of this. In response, the Panel was informed that a draft Benefits Realisation Plan would be available at the next meeting and members looked forward to receiving this.

Clarification as to why the review of the Council's surplus assets was off-track was requested and members were advised, in response, that there had been some challenges in recruiting staff to the Council's property department. Assurances were provided that the appropriate resources were now in place and that stock condition surveys were underway.

In response to queries around the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council's income, members were informed that there had been a significant loss of revenue from the Business and Conference Centre as a result of restrictions and that all capital investments into the Civic Centre had been paused. Despite this, members welcomed assurance that the Council was not solely reliant on income generated by external bookings.

Members queried the 'Active Streets' project and how the success of this was assessed. In response, the Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Wellbeing advised that the project had received good feedback in Leyland and that several families had been engaged with.

Success would be assessed in relation to anti-social behaviour levels, but further detail would be provided later in the year once easier to measure. The Panel welcomed this and requested that this evaluation and details of any further roll-out be provided to members.

Information on progress with the Leyland Loop was also requested.

Queries were also raised regarding the outcome of homelessness interventions during the coronavirus pandemic. Those at risk were housed during the initial lockdown but this would not be on a permanent basis. It was acknowledged that circumstances had provided an opportunity for the Council to consider how best to help those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Members were interested to note how the Youth Council project would target hard-to-reach youth. Planning for this was still underway but it was suggested that debate clubs in schools would enable the scheme to be inclusive and accessible to all young people.

The Panel commended the council's approach to supporting residents during the pandemic and queried if there was capacity to maintain this level of support. In response, a need for additional resources was acknowledged but reassurances were given that the Council will continue to support residents.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Panel thanks the Leader and Interim Chief Executive for their detailed report and answering the Panel's questions.
2. the Panel looks forward to receiving a copy of the Benefits Realisation Plan once complete.
3. the Panel welcomes the strategic review of council assets and the reassurance that the resources and skills are now in place.
4. the Panel requests that the evaluation of 'Active Streets' and any details of any further roll-out be provided to members.
5. information on progress with the Leyland Loop be provided to members of the Panel.

20 South Ribble Corporate Strategy

The Panel considered a report of the Interim Chief Executive which outlined the Council's draft refreshed Corporate Strategy for 2020/21- 22/23 and sought feedback from on the proposed projects and performance measures.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation and requirements of the council was acknowledged and it was felt appropriate to review the Corporate Strategy to reflect these changes.

Members queried what tangible difference residents would see from this document and were advised that focus would be placed on green spaces, homes for all and a fair council.

The need for plain English in the Corporate Strategy was reiterated by the Panel with members particularly querying the use of terms such as *exemplary*, *empowerment*, *community wealth building*, and *social value*. Assurances were given that the corporate jargon in the Strategy would be reviewed in the final document, following the request of the Panel.

In response to queries regarding confidence in the delivery of the new Corporate Strategy projects, members were informed that the process would be undertaken with the utmost transparency and that additional resources may be required for individual projects.

Members questioned if the projects and outcomes identified in the refreshed Corporate Strategy were SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and

Timebound) and were pleased to note that this would be monitored on a regular basis.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Panel thanks the Leader and Interim Chief Executive for engaging the Panel with this important document
2. the Panel requests that the Strategy be reviewed to ensure it is in plain English
3. the Panel welcomes the new refreshed Corporate Strategy
4. the Panel welcomes the reassurance that the Strategy will be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound) and will link to the next budget process.

21 Budget Monitoring 2020-21 Quarter 1

The Panel considered a report of the Section 151 Officer which provided an update on the Council's overall financial position at the end of Quarter 1 of the 2020-21 financial year.

Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets, informed the Panel that an underspend of £29,000 was forecasted for the end of the financial year.

Additional capital had been spent due to COVID-19 to the sum of £16 million, but this was covered by central government grants.

Discussion largely focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and members questioned the concern of is this to the Cabinet Member and Section 151 Officer. In response, members were advised that concerns were minimal due to government support and the ability to spread any deficit over three years.

Queries were also raised on staff vacancies and the impact of this on service delivery. Delays in recruitment were acknowledged but the Council was still delivering on its targets.

Some concern was raised that the Council's earmarked reserves remained high and members requested further clarity on how these are assessed to ensure appropriacy. In response, the Panel was advised that the reserves are assessed annually but commitment was provided to review these reserves given the situation surrounding the pandemic.

In response to queries regarding the Borough Investment Account, confirmation was provided that this money would be invested into South Ribble but work was still ongoing to identify opportunities for a sufficient return and tangible benefits for residents.

Members were pleased that the additional narrative as requested at the last meeting had been included in the Capital Programme and sought assurances that the newly-reprofiled Capital Programme was deliverable. The Cabinet Member and Section 151 confirmed their confidence in this.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Panel thanks the Cabinet Member and Section 151 Officer for their report and for answering the Panel's questions.
2. the Panel welcomes the Cabinet Member's commitment to review the level of earmarked reserves.
3. the Panel expresses its thanks for taking its feedback forward in providing greater narrative.

Chair

Date