

- MINUTES OF SCRUTINY BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**
- MEETING DATE** Monday, 9 November 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, Leisure and Wellbeing)) and Matthew Tomlinson (Cabinet Member (Finance, Property and Assets))
- OFFICERS:** Gary Hall (Interim Chief Executive), James Thomson (Deputy Director of Finance), Victoria Willett (Service Lead - Transformation and Partnerships), Darren Cranshaw (Shared Services Lead - Democratic, Scrutiny & Electoral Services) and Charlotte Lynch (Democratic and Member Services Officer)
- OTHER MEMBERS:** Councillor Jacky Alty (Member Champion (Social Justice and Equality)) and Councillor Michael Green
- PUBLIC:** 0
- 22 Apologies for absence**
- None.
- 23 Declarations of Interest**
- None.
- 24 Minutes of meeting Monday, 14 September 2020 of Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel**
- RESOLVED: (Unanimously)
- That the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Monday 14 September 2020, be approved as a correct record.
- 25 Matters Arising from Previous Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel Meetings**
- RESOLVED: (Unanimously)
- That
1. the matters arising from previous meetings of the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel be noted; and

2. those completed actions be removed from the report.

26 Period 2 (July - September) 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 2 (July-September 2020).

Overall, performance of the projects was good, with 8 out of 14 projects marked as on-track. The remaining projects were either still being developed or scoped before commencement.

The report presented a position statement on the Corporate Strategy adopted in September 2020 and members queried how other performance indicators, such as resident satisfaction, council tax collection rates and missed bins, would be monitored. Assurances were provided that this information was still being monitored and would be incorporated into individual directorate performance reports to be presented to future Panel meetings.

Members acknowledged the wide-ranging and ambitious nature of the Council's priorities but offered a contrast with the projects within the 'Exemplary Council' priority, which were felt to be narrow in focus.

In response to this and a query regarding how the link between projects and priorities could be strengthened, members were informed that all projects were scoped to ensure clarity and a more streamlined approach. It was suggested, however, that the project mandates could be supplied to members to provide further detail and the Panel welcomed this.

A period of positive change for the Council was noted and members queried other methods of transformation besides Shared Services with Chorley Council, which was highlighted in the report. In response, members were informed that every directorate would undertake a review of their service; significant work on digital inclusion was being performed, with a new website set to launch; and organisational development was underway with staff.

Members expressed their interest in work on organisational development and requested that this be looked at in more detail at a future meeting.

Clarification was sought on the 'One Front Door' model and it was explained that this would incorporate a range of services, such as Citizen's Advice, to improve accessibility for residents and those presenting themselves to the council for support. Some aspects of the model were already in operation and it was anticipated that the full model would be rolled out by the end of November 2020.

The work of the South Ribble Together Hub and the Holiday Hunger Scheme was queried with members seeking further information on any financial implications for the Council.

In response, members were informed that the Holiday Hunger Scheme was introduced in summer 2019 and currently provides food for children during all school holidays. Assistance is also now offered to all self-identifying low-income families, with approximately 2000 families helped during the October 2020 half term.

A budget of approximately £90,000 had been allocated to the project for a three-year period and some government funding was included in this. However, the Leader of the Council acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic meant that a significant amount of this budget had been used.

Members also queried the timeline for the delivery of mental health support for young people, given how COVID-19 had exacerbated mental health issues for many people. Assurances were provided that a review of the recommendations made by the MH2K project would be developed by April 2021 with support launched in September 2021.

Some interim support work had been undertaken at Runshaw College in addition to the production of helpful videos. Members were assured that there were other support mechanisms in place for young people struggling with their mental health and that the project was a key priority.

Members also welcomed the availability of support for those aged up to 24 years and the interim measures in place but requested that the timescales for delivery of the project be reviewed.

The Council's role in tackling the percentage of 16- and 17-year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) was questioned. In response, members were advised of Council-supported opportunities through the Apprentice Factory; partnerships with schools and local businesses to provide opportunities for young people; requirements within the procurement process for contractors to employ local apprentices; and the Community Wealth Building Action Plan initiative.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Panel thanks the Leader, Chief Executive and Shared Services Lead – Partnerships and Transformation for presenting such a detailed report and answering questions;
2. the Panel looks forward to the directorate performance indicators being presented to future meetings;
3. the Panel welcomes the offer of the corporate strategy project mandates being provided to panel members;
4. the Panel asks that that a future meeting takes a 'deep dive' into the organisational development strategy; and
5. the timeframes involved in the project to deliver a mental health programme for young people be reviewed.

27 Corporate Performance Framework Review

The Panel considered a report of the Shared Services Lead for Transformation and Partnerships which presented the outcomes of a review into the Council's Corporate Performance Framework.

The need for sound and robust performance monitoring data was acknowledged in order to promote confidence in the operation of the Council.

Members queried if performance information on other Council services, such as missed bin collections, could be more explicitly reflected in the Framework and were advised that detailed breakdowns of performance in each service could be provided to the Scrutiny Budget and Performance Panel to allow members to decide what to assess further.

Assurances were sought regarding the quality of data with members querying accuracy and reliability. In response, members were informed that all performance measures were reviewed by officers and subject to sign-off by senior officers. Workshops would also be held for those who collect data to ensure sufficient training and knowledge.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Panel thanks the Leader of the Council, Interim Chief Executive and Shared Services Lead – Transformation and Partnerships for presenting their report and answering questions; and
2. the Panel asks that consideration be given to being explicit on the level of performance information being reported.

28 Budget Monitoring 2020-21 Quarter 2

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 2 of the 2020-21 financial year.

Members acknowledged the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council's finances and requested an update on the current budgetary implications of support provided by the council. In response, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets (Councillor Matthew Tomlinson) advised that the situation was ever-changing but that £20 million had been provided to support businesses during the initial lockdown earlier in the year and additional funding from central government was anticipated to cover the second lockdown period.

Members welcomed the Cabinet Member's suggestion of incorporating all COVID-19-related financial information into one report in the interests of transparency and ease of monitoring.

A savings target of £187,000 was identified in the report and the Panel queried how this would be achieved. This figure was noted as target savings from Shared Services but members were informed that, due to issues in Human Resources, these savings would not be met. A report detailing proposals for further savings would be considered at the next Full Council meeting.

Queries were also raised regarding the garden waste scheme which had achieved a surplus income. As the income was more than expected, members enquired if a further cut could be made to charges but were advised that, although the reduced charge had led to an increase in subscriptions, the Cabinet Member was confident in the appropriacy of the current £25 fee.

Similarly, members noted a deficit in income from court summons and were informed that this was a result of courts being closed due to the pandemic but also because of the need for sensitivity and compassion during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Discussion largely focused on staff vacancies and the progress of recruiting a second Enforcement Officer and Head of Licensing was queried. Work was underway to ascertain whether there was sufficient workload to justify employing an additional Enforcement Officer. A consultant was currently commissioned by the Council to handle complex cases with the permanent Officer working on day-to-day cases and there was an option to continue with this model if considered suitable going forwards.

The Head of Licensing position remained vacant due to progress with Shared Services and members were assured that interim management arrangements would be confirmed within the second phase.

In response to a query regarding the replacement of the South Ribble Museum Curator, who had recently retired, it was explained that this was a Shared Services post within the Visitor Economy directorate and that a temporary 12-month arrangement was in place with the intention to review after this period.

Assurances were also sought on the number of vacancies within the Governance directorate. Some concern was acknowledged but it was felt that there was no impact on ability to deliver services.

An update on the progress of the review of reserves was requested and members were informed that this was ongoing and would form part of the next year's budget process, which members welcomed.

The Panel was also pleased to note the Cabinet Member's confidence in the current delivery of the capital programme.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That

1. the Panel thanks the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Assets and Deputy Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) for their detailed report and answering questions;
2. the Panel welcomes the relatively small variance in budget so far in the year;
3. the Panel supports the Cabinet Member's proposal to bring together all COVID-19 related financial information into the one report for monitoring purposes;
4. the Panel looks forward to the results of the review of reserves as part of next year's budget process; and
5. the Panel is encouraged with the delivery of the capital programme at this stage in the year.

Chair

Date